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CHINESE LITERATURE

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Registration

by CHAO SHU-LI

Young friends, I'm going to tell you a new story, and it all begins with a "Lohan coin". Thirty years ago I wouldn't have had to explain what a Lohan coin was, but today it's probably necessary.

They say that it was minted in the 17th century during the reign of Emperor Kang Hsi (1662 - 1723) of the Ching Dynasty. It was the same size as other coins of that period, but the copper in it had a special sheen that looked like gold. Some people claim that a gold image of Lohan was mixed in with the molten metal used for the coinage, and as a result each piece contained 30% gold. We don't care whether that theory is true — the fact is the coins were very attractive. Many's the person who took five Lohans to the goldsmith and had a ring made. If you saw the ring worn on somebody's finger, you'd swear it was the real thing.

But not many coins were minted, and they were hard to get hold of. Even when they still were in circulation, clever children, watching every coin that came into the house, were lucky if they could find one a year. Young peasant lads with an eye for pretty things liked to hold a Lohan in their mouths — just the way some city dwellers enjoy having a gold tooth. Right up to today there are a few out-of-the-way places where that habit still exists. Anyhow, the coins don't circulate any more. Whoever's got one won't let it out of his hands. And now let's get to the story:

In Leaning Willow lives Chang, the carpenter, and his good wife, Lovely Moth. They have a daughter, Ai-ai, who was nineteen on the Lantern Festival of 1950. She and a boy by the name of Wan fell in love. Our tale starts with these two young people.

Listening to me tell this story, you friends with an impatient nature may think I'm an amateur. Perhaps you say, "You talk a

lot about the Lohan coin, but when you come to the characters involved you're very brief. In that case, you'll probably finish the story in five minutes!" It's not really going to be like that at all. It's just that some things have to be explained sooner and some things later. But enough of idle chatter. Let me continue:

The Chang family lived alone in a small hollow square compound of one-story buildings. Chang and his wife occupied the north wing. Their daughter Ai-ai slept in the west wing. On the Lantern Festival holiday this year (1950), the village was gay with lantern and dragon games. The carpenter was an expert manipulator of the tail of the big cloth dragon. The evening our story opens, he left the house right after dinner to play his usual role in the dragon dance.

After she finished washing the pots and bowls, Ai-ai went out with her mother. The women locked the compound gate and strolled through the village to watch the fun.

Each member of the family went their separate ways. Chang joined the dragon dance; Lovely Moth mingled with her friends and neighbors; Ai-ai watched the fireworks because they were being set off by young Wan.

Ai-ai was the first to go home. While waiting for her mother's return, she fell asleep on Lovely Moth's bed. A little later, Lovely Moth came back and gently shook the sleeping girl.

"Ai-ai, wake up!" she whispered.

But her daughter only rolled over on her side. As she turned, a small bright object slipped out of her pocket and fell tinkling to the floor. Lovely Moth picked it up and examined it in the lamp light.

"That girl!" she muttered. "When did she get hold of my Lohan coin?"

The coin originally had been locked in her jewel box in a chest. Wanting to return the Lohan to its hiding place, Lovely Moth took her keys and opened the chest and the box. But there was her coin just as she had left it! She compared it with Ai-ai's. Except for the fact that the gleam of Lovely Moth's talisman was a little duller, the coins were identical!

She glanced at her slumbering daughter. "Silly girl!" she said softly. "So you've done it too! You've given him your ring for it!" She looked at Ai-ai's slim fingers. They were bare. Lightly, she groped in the girl's pocket. It was empty except for a thimble.

"Ah!" sighed Lovely Moth. "Mother and daughter both exchanged their rings for Lohan coins!" She shook her head. "I must see matchmaker Aunty Wu the first thing in the morning and settle Ai-ai's engagement. We can't let this thing go any further!" She put the thimble back in the pocket.

Lovely Moth sat staring at the two Lohans, as she recalled the history of her own coin.

Now this I absolutely have to explain. And in order to give you a clear picture of the background of her Lohan, I must go back over twenty years to the time she married Chang the carpenter.

Chang was completely entranced by his beautiful bride and didn't leave the house for nine days after their wedding. He did everything in his power to make her happy and amuse her. But Lovely Moth was unresponsive to all his tricks and antics. Even when he put on her flowered gown and made up like a woman, she only said coldly, "Stop acting the fool!"

A few months later, a piece of scandal reached Leaning Willow from the nearby village of East Wang, the bride's native place. The story was that before her marriage, Lovely Moth had been intimate with a young fellow named Pao. The youths in Leaning Willow ribbed Chang unmercifully.

"Little carpenter, when you go home you better cough before you go in the door! You don't want to bump into Pao!"

"What makes you think Lovely Moth is yours? Pao owns at least half of her!"

Chang said nothing but he understood why his bride showed so little interest in him. Several times he wanted to have it out with her, but each time he weakened. What's past is past, he thought. As long as she behaves herself from now on . . . .

But when the news came to the ears of his mother, the old lady took him aside and berated him as "spineless". "You have to give her a good beating!" she insisted firmly. "People learn only through pain and suffering! That's the only way she'll reform! If you're too soft to do it, she'll make you a laughing-stock! . . . "

Chang was convinced. From that day, he just waited for the time and the excuse.

Not long after, he had some business in East Wang. There he met Pao and noticed that the young man wore a ring identical with the one that adorned Lovely Moth's finger.

"Mother's — !" he swore to himself. "She really is one-half Pao's!" When Chang got back to Leaning Willow he reported what he had seen to his mother.

"Hurry up and beat her!" ordered the old lady. "Give it to her hard! No other way will do!"

She continued to egg him on until Chang was seething with rage. He grasped a heavy iron poker and started for the door. His mother stopped him.

"You can't use that," she cautioned. "Put it down! Something thin will hurt just as much and won't break any bones! Here, take this stick!" The old lady handed him a supple switch a foot and a half long, no thicker than a finger.

How did she know so much about the technique of wife-beating? Well, when she was young she had had an affair like Lovely Moth, and her husband had used just such a stick on her.

But to continue — Chang took the switch and left his mother's quarters. With a face as black as a thunder-cloud, he crossed the courtyard to the wing where he lived with his bride. Lovely Moth's greeting was with her usual polite reserve.

"What are you doing with that stick?" she asked curiously.

Chang pointed with it at her hand. "What happened to the mate to that ring?" he demanded menacingly.

The hair on Lovely Moth's scalp stood on end. She raised her head and stared at her husband. He looked as if he was ready to eat her alive. She was frightened speechless. Chang whipped the stick a cutting blow across her thigh. Lovely Moth cried out in surprise and pain. She had been tenderly raised and no one had ever struck her.

Her husband seized her by the hair and dragged her to the bed. Flinging her face down, he yanked off her trousers. Whack! Whack! Whack! . . . Chang flailed the switch whistling against her quivering flesh.

At first she tried not to cry out. She was afraid her screams would bring the neighbors and that they would laugh to see her in this state. But when the beating went on and on, she wanted to cry but couldn't. She could only gasp and squirm, for the cruel stick whirled too fast.

Finally, exhausted, Chang flung the switch aside and stalked out. Every nerve in Lovely Moth's body seemed drawn to her exposed place. She lay panting and moaning, unable to move. Her head was drenched with perspiration as if it had been dunked in a

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pot of hot soup. It was many minutes before her alternate gasps and sobs blended into loud outraged weeping.

But no one could hear her outside the walls of the small compound. Chang had gone and her mother-in-law didn't even come to look at her. Instead, from another wing, the old lady merely railed sarcastically, "What are you crying about? Do you want everyone to come and see the fine show you're putting on!"

After a while, Lovely Moth was able to control herself. Her buttocks were lacerated and raw. When she reached back and touched them gingerly, her hand came away stained with blood. Gritting her teeth, she pulled up her trousers.

Chang never asked her again why she had given a ring to Pao. Naturally, she didn't offer to tell him. Before her marriage, Lovely Moth had been in love with Pao. When she went to spend the Dragon Boat Festival with her parents after she had married Chang, she met Pao. She presented him with the ring and he gave her his Lohan coin, for old time's sake. The coin became more precious to her than ever after the beating.

Now her apathy toward Chang turned to dread; she recoiled from him as from a wild beast. Lovely Moth trembled each time she had to speak to him and he never saw her smile. When the carpenter entered the compound gate at the end of a day's work, sometimes he would catch a glimpse of her, vibrant and gay, shooing the chickens back to their nests. But the minute she saw him, something within her seemed to die. Dully and properly, she would go into the house, without a word.

On one such occasion, Chang angrily followed her to their room. "People call you 'Lovely Moth'," he shouted. "How is it that your wings droop as soon as you set eyes on me! What am I anyway!" He slapped her sharply across the face.

Thereafter, fear of her husband's temper made her try to smile at him when they met. But the smiles were so pathetically forced that it would have been better if she hadn't tried in the first place. Chang was unhappy and gradually lost interest in her. He took work in other villages which frequently kept him away from home a year on end. It was rumored that he found consolation in the arms of many other women.

The only company Lovely Moth had during the carpenter's absence was her mother-in-law, and the old lady never spoke to

her if she could help it. Lovely Moth's parents lived in a village quite nearby but Pao lived there too. Because of the suspicion she was under she didn't dare go to visit them. After her parents learned of her disgrace, they were too ashamed to come to see her. The result was that Lovely Moth was left friendless and alone. Her life became divided between taking care of her mother-in-law and playing with the Lohan coin.

Every night, after the old lady went to bed, Lovely Moth would retire to her room and lock the door. Then she would take out the coin and look at it.

"Lohan," she would often whisper, "you're the cause of my downfall, but you're my savior too! I'll die before I part with you!"

There were times when she played with the coin like a child. She would warm it in the palm of her hand, imprint it on her cheek, press it against her bosom, hold it in her mouth. . . . Except during Chang's rare brief stays at home, Lovely Moth never slept without it. Only after Ai-ai was born did she lock the Lohan coin in her jewel box. There it joined the ring she had put away after she was beaten.

The year Ai-ai was fifteen, Lovely Moth was looking through the jewel box to find a bauble to sew on her daughter's hat. Standing beside her, Ai-ai was attracted by the ring and began to toy with it. To ward off the possibility of Ai-ai's wanting to explore the box any further and perhaps discovering the Lohan coin, Lovely Moth made her a present of the ring and hastily locked the jewel case.

By then, the carpenter and his wife were on fairly good terms. Their daughter was grown up, Chang's mother was dead, and Lovely Moth had long since broken off her relations with Pao. Ai-ai was their only child. Playing and joking with the girl had brought them closer together. When Chang noticed Lovely Moth's ring on Ai-ai's finger he felt safe to comment on it in his wife's presence.

"That ring used to be one of a pair," he said dryly to Ai-ai.

"What happened to the other one?"

"Ask your mother."

Ai-ai caught the flashing glance which Lovely Moth shot at Chang. Assuming that her mother was being teased for having lost the other ring, she asked no further questions.

That is how one of Lovely Moth's most prized possessions came to be worn by Ai-ai. The girl cherished her mother's gift and

was never seen without it — until that night three years later during the Lantern Festival in 1950 when Lovely Moth discovered that the ring was missing from Ai-ai's finger. When in addition, a Lohan dropped from the pocket of the sleeping girl, her mother's shock was almost unbearable.

Sunk in the bitter-sweet memories which her own coin evoked — the ecstacy, the pain — Lovely Moth worried what to do about Ai-ai's talisman. She stared at the two Lohans. Good or bad, she thought, my experiences are past. Shall I take Ai-ai's coin — her love token? How do I know how much she's suffered for it already? Give it back to her? How can I let her tread my thorny path?

Still unable to make up her mind, the slam of the compound gate broke the train of her meditations. It was nearly dawn, and Chang had come home from the dragon dance. She put both Lohans in her jewel box and locked it quickly, just as the carpenter entered. Seeing Ai-ai still sleeping on Lovely Moth's bed, Chang grumbled that the girl was being spoiled. He wakened his daughter and sent her back to her own room. Then he locked the door and started to undress.

"The past two years many matches were offered for our Ai-ai," he whispered, "but you turned them all down. What about the latest one Aunty Wu introduced? We'd better get the girl married soon — the village is full of gossip about her. She and her friend Yen-yen are the only eligible girls who haven't married and they both have the reputation of attracting trouble. When Yen-yen becomes a bride, that'll leave only our Ai-ai!"

"Didn't the village officials refuse to give Yen-yen and young Chin an official letter of introduction to the district Registrar?" asked Lovely Moth. "Did they change their minds?"

"No, they still think she's a trouble-maker. After the way she's been carrying on with Chin, of course they won't write it. Aunty Wu is making the match for a boy in the village of West Wang. They're going down to ask for the letter the day after tomorrow."

"It seems to me that the people in our administration are hypocrites. They don't know what's proper and what's not," said Lovely Moth heatedly. "If our Ai-ai has such a bad reputation, how is it that we received so many proposals for her? Why did the civil clerk ask Aunty Wu to try to make a match for her with his own nephew?"

"What kind of a family does the nephew come from?"

"I don't really know much about them except that they live in the same village with my mother. Aunty Wu is going there tomorrow. I can go to visit my mother and at the same time drop in on them."

"That's a good idea," approved Chang. After a brief silence, he said hesitantly, "I must ask you a question, not a very nice one — has our Ai-ai been having an affair with young Wan?"

Lovely Moth had no intention of telling him what she knew about the Lohan coin. "Let's not bother about that," she said evasively. "The girl is grown up and we must find her a husband. Then there won't be any trouble!"

Just like her mother at her age, from the time she got the Lohan coin Ai-ai couldn't sleep without it. When she reached her room, she put her hand in her pocket for the coin. It was gone. Holding the oil lamp low, she searched the floor. There was no responding gleam to the flickering lamp light.

The next morning, after a restless night, Ai-ai was the first one up. She took a broom and began to sweep the house thoroughly, room by room. No luck. Ai-ai moped despondently for about an hour. Then the click of a door latch told her that her parents were awake. Seizing her broom she barged into their room. With much diligence and vigor, she swept every inch of the floor — even under the beds.

Lovely Moth knew her daughter was looking for the Lohan and that the search was useless. But she only smiled and said, "My Ai-ai certainly is working like a good girl today."

After breakfast, Aunty Wu came to invite Lovely Moth to visit with her the home of Ai-ai's proposed groom. According to his habit of twenty years standing, Chang announced that he would go along.

This habit began from the time he discovered that Lovely Moth had given a ring to Pao. It was then it became clear to Chang that Lovely Moth didn't love him, and his feelings toward his wife had changed. But each time she went to see her mother, he acted as if he were still mad about her. He escorted her every step of way to East Wang and back. And the habit remained till this day.

"Don't you trust me yet?" Lovely Moth once asked him.

"I've gotten used to this way," said the carpenter. "Let's keep it as it is."

And so, on this morning, it was agreed that Chang would make the trip with the two women. Lovely Moth invited Ai-ai to join them.

"I'd rather not," said the girl. "We saw Grandma only two weeks ago."

"Stay home then and take care of the house for me," said Chang. "Don't go flying about the village!"

The moment they were gone, Ai-ai resumed her search for the missing coin. Never dreaming that it was locked in her mother's jewel box, she carefully retraced her steps of the night before. By noon she still hadn't seen even a hint of the precious Lohan. Ai-ai was too miserable to feel like preparing lunch. She toasted and ate a couple of slices of steamed bread.

As she was gloomily munching, young Wan walked in. Ai-ai urgently grasped his hand.

"The Lohan coin is gone!"

"If it's lost, it's lost."

"I was so upset I could hardly eat."

"What's there to be upset about? What good will it do? I heard that your father and mother have gone off with that old matchmaker to get you a husband. Is that true?"

"It won't do them any good!"

"Why not?"

"I won't agree!"

"What can you do about it?"

"At least I can try!"

The sound of someone approaching the house was heard and the youngsters immediately fell silent. Their faces lit up when Yen-yen, the other girl "trouble-maker" in the village, came in. Ai-ai greeted her warmly.

Finding the pair alone, Yen-yen laughed. "Pardon me! I'd better be going!"

Ai-ai smiled without answering. She placed her hands on Yen-yen's shoulders and firmly pressed her down on a bench.

"How are you two getting on?" asked Yen-yen. "Have you thought of a plan yet?"

"We were just talking about that now," said Ai-ai.

Yen-yen looked at them with red rimmed eyes. "Hurry up," she urged. "Don't be useless like me, and delay!" She began to cry softly.

The hearts of Ai-ai and Wan ached for her. There was a painful silence.

"Have you applied yet?" Wan asked Yen-yen.

"Tomorrow!"

"What kind of a boy is he?" asked Ai-ai.

"I haven't even seen his shadow!"

"Can't you get out of it?" Ai-ai persisted.

Yen-yen sighed. "My mother says she'll kill herself if I don't agree! What can I do?"

"Why did the village administration office refuse to give you and Chin a letter last December?" queried Ai-ai. "What reason did they give?"

"Reason!" sniffed Yen-yen. "The reason was that the civil clerk has a dead brain. He said we had a bad reputation! Not only wouldn't he write a letter of recommendation, he told me to criticize myself!"

"When you go down tomorrow, won't the clerk tell you to criticize yourself again?" asked Wan.

"They don't need me to go. As long as the parents agree, any one can ask for the letter. Some freedom of marriage! And yet they say they're opposed to parents controlling marriages!"

"It looks like we're finished," Wan said to Ai-ai. "In the first place, the one Aunty Wu is introducing is the civil clerk's nephew. Secondly, your mother is going to approve him. Today she'll come back and start to work on you and tomorrow you'll be registered at the district government office!"

"My mother won't work on me," said Ai-ai firmly, "because she's afraid I'll raise a fuss!"

Outside, a voice was heard calling, "Uncle Chang, Uncle Chang!" The footsteps of the visitor came crunching across the compound.

"It's Chin, coming looking for you!" whispered Ai-ai to Yen-yen. Before Yen-yen had chance to reply, young Chin rushed into the room.

For several days Yen-yen had been wanting to see him and pour out her troubles, but she had been kept too busy at home. When her lover entered, she sat beside Ai-ai on the bed to give him her place on the bench. Yen-yen stared at him. She didn't know where to begin. Chin paid no attention to her, nor did he sit down.

"Where's Uncle Chang?" he asked Ai-ai. "The boys are all out in the threshing ground. We'd like to ask him to teach us how to play the dragon."

"He went to my grandmother's. Have a seat."

"I'm busy!" He glanced coldly at Yen-yen and went out. In the courtyard, he turned and shouted, "Wan! Come along and play! Why waste your time? Tell your father to spend a few

bushels of rice and get you a girl! There are plenty around!" He disappeared through the compound gate.

Yen-yen threw herself down on the bed and sobbed. For a while, all of Ai-ai and Wan's soothing couldn't stem her tears. At last she stopped crying.

"You two must think of a way not to be broken apart," Yen-yen said fiercely. "You see how awful it is!"

"What do you want us to do?" said Ai-ai. "Every grown-up in the village is so old-fashioned — none of them is willing to help us. I can't even find anybody who'll speak to my mother for me."

"No one says a good word for us," Wan added. "Not a day goes by without some old duffer telling my father — 'Better get the boy properly engaged soon. Don't put it off any longer!' "

Angrily, Yen-yen sat bolt upright. "I'll be the one to bring you together!" she vowed. "I'll speak to your parents for you!" She gripped Ai-ai's hand. "You and I are the 'bad' girls in this village. Well, I'm not going to let them do to you what they've done to me!"

Wan jumped to his feet. "Yen-yen, I salute you! Even if you don't succeed, we can't be any worse off than we are already. Anything is better than just dangling like this. It's settled then. I have to go." He grinned at the girls as he departed. "I don't want the civil clerk to see me here and tell you to criticize yourselves again!"

The girls feverishly began making their plans — who should say what to whom; what to do if Aunty Wu convinced Lovely Moth on the civil clerk's nephew. In the middle of the strategy conference, Ai-ai's mother returned with the matchmaker. Aunty Wu was still working hard to sell her choice of a groom for Ai-ai.

"No matter how you look at it," she chattered rapidly, "whether from the point of view of the boy or his family — there's nothing wrong with any of them. His mother is our civil clerk's sister, and you know what a fine disposition she has! Ai-ai would be well treated in that family! You must be sure to make the right decision!"

"I think you've said enough," replied Lovely Moth brusquely. "Let me talk this over with Ai-ai's father."

Aware that it wouldn't do any good to keep pressing for an immediate answer, the old matchmaker politely took her leave. Ai-ai beamed happily.

Why was Lovely Moth so unwilling? Let me tell you what happened when she and her husband went with Aunty Wu to East Wang. The matchmaker wanted to go directly to the family of the proposed groom, but Lovely Moth disagreed.

"It won't look good if we call on them together," she said. "You go there first, while Chang and I visit my mother. I'll come a little later, saying that I'm calling for you so that we can keep each other company on the trip back to our village. I don't want them to think that we're keen on making the match!"

When Aunty Wu reached the house of the intended in-laws, only the parents were at home. The boy himself was out playing somewhere. After a few minutes of casual conversation, the father came to the point.

"Last time you mentioned three girls. Now which one do you really think is the best?"

"In my opinion, they're all about the same," replied Aunty Wu. "But two of them have already found husbands. That leaves only Lovely Moth's daughter."

"How did it happen so quickly?"

"Eighteen and nineteen-year-old girls never stay single very long."

"I told you to hurry and make up your mind," the mother berated her husband. "But not you! You had to be slow, and delay! Now the good ones are already picked!"

"There are still plenty of younger girls," said Aunty Wu slyly. "What do you say to one about fourteen or fifteen? Anyhow, that's older than your son."

The mother bridled indignantly. "Don't joke about this, Aunty! If we wanted a girl that young, we wouldn't have had to bother you!"

"Why do you say the good ones are picked already?" demanded the matchmaker. "What's the matter with Lovely Moth's daughter? If you ask me, she's by far the prettiest of the three. I think you've seen her — isn't she just as lovely as her mother was twenty years ago?"

"She's not bad-looking," the woman admitted, "but we hear her reputation's not so good."

"If it weren't for that slight fault do you think at eighteen she'd still be unmarried? And weren't the other two girls just the same?"

"But since she has that fault, won't we be spending money just to buy ourselves a bag of trouble?"

"You shouldn't listen to all that silly gossip. If there was anything seriously wrong with the girl would your brother the civil clerk ask me to make the match? What does a little fault like that mean, anyhow? After she's married, you can correct it."

"How are we going to correct it? Like mother, like daughter. Lovely Moth always was a hussy!"

"Of course it can be corrected! Pain is the best teacher! You'll give her a good hard beating and that'll be the end of it!"

"She was born with the trait," said the husband doubtfully. "Can we beat it out of her?"

"Why not?" replied Aunty Wu. "Didn't Chang's switch do the job when he married Lovely Moth?"

It was at this point in the discussion that Lovely Moth entered the courtyard. She overheard the matchmaker's last remark and stopped in her tracks. Seeing that no one else was around, she turned and quietly left the courtyard.

"So the beating is to be passed from generation to generation, is it?" she fumed inwardly. "Not if I can help it! I don't need you to teach my daughter!" Lovely Moth returned to her mother's house.

"Well, what about it?" asked Chang.

"No good! The boy won't do!" snapped Lovely Moth. When her mother and husband pressed her for a reason, she said shortly, "Let's not talk about it. The boy isn't suitable!"

Lovely Moth's mother wanted to know why she looked so angry.

"It's nothing," said Lovely Moth. "I didn't get enough rest last night." She went into the next room to take a nap.

But how could she sleep? The words of Aunty Wu had opened her old wound. Would she ever rid herself of the burden of her past? Why should we, mother and daughter, have fates so alike? she thought. I don't know what evil spirit possessed me as a girl and made me exchange my ring for a Lohan coin. Because of that I was half beaten to death. Even now, I'm still treated like a criminal — the moment I step out of the door, Chang escorts me the way a jailor escorts a prisoner. Now it's all going to happen to Ai-ai. It's a curse on the women in our family! Mother and daughter both fall in the same snare! Poor silly girl! All her life your mother hasn't been able to escape — what hope do you have to get away!

Lovely Moth remembered the marriages of the women who were now of the same age as herself. Everyone who had received a

token from her lover before she became a bride — every single one of them — had a miserable life. All were beaten — some by their husbands, some by their mothers-in-law. A few were hounded into suicide. Others might just as well have been widows — their husbands completely ignored them. . . .

Anyhow, the root of Ai-ai's beating has already been planted, she mused bitterly. Why fight against this thing? She'll be whipped no matter whom she marries!

But it would be too simple to take the easy way out. Lovely Moth's rioting mind wouldn't let her rest. She couldn't forget the day when Chang devoured her with terrible eyes, the way he hauled her by the hair to the bed, how he beat her fiercely and relentlessly so that she couldn't catch her breath. . . . It was murderous! Even after twenty years, the recollection still made her tremble! How could Ai-ai ever stand such agony?

The struggle raged on in Lovely Moth's breast. She had no appetite when they called her for lunch. In order not to worry her mother, she forced down a few mouthfuls of food.

A little later, Aunty Wu, who had become tired of waiting, called at the house.

The matchmaker urged her to visit the family of the proposed groom.

"It's getting late," deferred Lovely Moth. "We want to get home before dark."

With Chang and Aunty Wu, she set out on the return trip to Leaning Willow. When the old matchmaker began praising the one hundred and twenty per cent perfection of the civil clerk's nephew, Lovely Moth turned a deaf ear. She flew down the road with the grace and swiftness that earned her nickname as a girl. All the way home, Aunty Wu was unable to close the gap of a good ten paces which Lovely Moth kept between them.

Upon entering the village, Chang was surrounded by a gang of boys. In answer to their pleas, he went to the threshing ground to teach them how to work the cloth dragon. Lovely Moth went directly home, trailed by the persistent matchmaker. It was then that Aunty Wu met her rebuff and Ai-ai's shining eyes danced with joy.

Yen-yen felt that the moment had come. A significant look from her, and Ai-ai left the room. Yen-yen addressed herself to Lovely Moth.

"May I be a matchmaker for Ai-ai too?"

Lovely Moth thought this was a child's whimsy. "How can you be a matchmaker?" she smiled.

Yen-yen smiled back. "Why can't I?"

"Have you got a mouth like Aunty Wu?"

"Since she's such a good talker, why hasn't she talked you into agreeing with her?"

"I can't agree with her when she picks a boy who's not suitable."

"The point is, then, whether we can find someone suitable, not whether the matchmaker is a smooth talker! I can suggest a boy you're sure to approve of!"

"Let's hear it."

"I suggest Wan!"

"I knew you were going to say that! It's no use talking about him. You girls mustn't be so bold. There's too much gossip about you already."

"I could say like Aunty Wu — 'Whether from the point of view of the boy or his family — there's nothing wrong with any of them!' But my words are truer than the empty chatter of that old muddle-head! Honestly now, don't you think I'm right?"

"You're not looking at the other side of it. How would that stop the gossip?"

"The ones making the idle talk are all old fogies. They gossip only because of Wan. If Ai-ai marries him there won't be anything left for them to say!"

Yen-yen's got something there! thought Lovely Moth. Marrying Wan would stop the gossip all right. And I wouldn't have to worry about him beating her. She looked at Yen-yen affectionately and gently stroked the girl's hair.

"Dear child," she smiled. "You make a fine matchmaker."

Sensing that Lovely Moth was wavering, Yen-yen asked her quickly, "Then you agree?"

The older woman looked thoughtful. "Don't be impatient," she said finally. "There's still Ai-ai's father. Wait till I've talked it over with him."

Satisfied, Yen-yen said good-bye to Lovely Moth and left to cross the courtyard toward Ai-ai's room. As she walked through the door she nearly stumbled over her. Ai-ai had been listening at the window. With her finger to her lips, she led Yen-yen out of the compound.

"Then you heard everything!" said Yen-yen when they reached the street.

"Everything!" said Ai-ai. "I don't know how to thank you!"

"Don't thank me yet. There's another party I still have to convince! Wait for me in front of the co-op store and watch the lantern games. I have to try Wan's house now!" Yen-yen trotted briskly off to her next objective.

Again she did things the feminine way. She approached Wan's mother. In Leaning Willow, once the proposed bride's family had expressed its willingness, it was easy to get the boy's family to agree to the match. In a surprisingly short time, Yen-yen obtained the approval of Wan's mother.

She hurried to the co-op and dragged Ai-ai to a quiet spot where she reported the news of victory. "And if your mother can convince your father tonight," Yen-yen concluded breathlessly, "tomorrow you can go with Wan and register!"

Ai-ai thanked her a thousand times and happily returned home. Yen-yen suddenly remembered her own affair and the joy at her friend's good fortune drained from her heart.

In the security of the secluded place, she wept silently. Only after the streets were deserted did she go back to her house. Lying in bed, Yen-yen miserably wondered whether she should sacrifice herself by registering her marriage at the district office the next day, or refuse and offend her mother. All night she wrestled with the problem. At dawn she was still wide awake.

And what about Lovely Moth? After Yen-yen had departed, she mentally itemized everything she knew about Wan and his family — they were earning a living; they got along well with one another; Wan's parents had even dispositions, the boy was good-looking and respectable; he was the same age as Ai-ai. . . . She could think of nothing wrong with them.

Lovely Moth decided to give her full consent. "Ai-ai," she whispered to herself, "you see things very clearly! And the gossipers really are a bunch of old fogies!"

She opened her trunk and took out Ai-ai's Lohan coin. Lovely Moth pondered how to go about giving it back to her daughter. As she sat thoughtfully kneading the token in the palm of her hand, Ai-ai gaily burst into the room.

"What's that you've got, Ma?" asked the girl, spying the glittering object.

Holding it between her two fingers, Lovely Moth replied, "A Lohan coin!"

"Where did you get it?"

"I found it."

"Ma, it's mine!"

"And where did you get it?"

"I — I found it too!" laughed Ai-ai.

Lovely Moth looked long at her daughter's face. "Here. If it's yours, take it."

They smiled at each other as Ai-ai returned the Lohan to her pocket.

Before long, Chang came home and Ai-ai retired to her room. The carpenter and his wife began to discuss the question of their daughter's marriage. On the other side of the courtyard, Ai-ai couldn't hear what they were saying, although she crawled to the foot of her bed and glued her ear to the window. From the sound of their voices, she could only tell that they were arguing. Ai-ai slept very badly that night.

The next morning, she finished the household chores in record time and rushed over to see her young "matchmaker". She intended to ask Yen-yen to find out the results of the talk her parents had the previous night. But from the scene which met her eye when she reached her friend's house she knew she had better postpone her request.

Although this was the day Yen-yen was due to go to the district government to register her marriage, she was still in bed. Her mother sat by her side, pleading. Aunty Wu was also there.

"What's the matter with Yen-yen?" asked Ai-ai anxiously.

"She's trying to kill me with aggravation!" said Yen-yen's mother.

"I've given in," said Yen-yen. "Why do you still say I aggravate you?"

"Then why won't you get out of bed?" asked her mother. "Dear! Don't exasperate me. Get up and listen to Aunty Wu explain what you have to do at the district government. And you have to go to the village administration office first for your letter of introduction. It's getting late!"

"I'll die before I go to the village administration office! That civil clerk'll only make me criticize myself again!"

"I'll go for you, if you like. Now don't you think you ought to get out of bed and listen to Aunty Wu tell you about the procedure?"

Yen-yen sat up angrily. "The whole business is the same old feudal routine! Yet you insist I pretend to be willing, and make a show of myself! Well, what is this fine procedure — let's hear it!"

"Don't be so stubborn, dear girl," said Aunty Wu silkily. "This is a happy event. You should be more cheerful."

"Hurry up and recite your phony procedure! What happy event? You may be happy — I'm not!"

"All right, all right! When we get to the district government, I'll hand in the letter of introduction to Registrar Wang. He'll ask you how old you are. You tell him. Then he'll ask if you're willing. You'll say that you are. . . . "

"You call this being willing!" interrupted Yen-yen.

"Silly child! You only have to *say* that you're willing!" explained Aunty Wu. "If he asks you why, you answer, 'Because he's a good worker.' "

"Farts! I haven't even seen him. How do I know whether he's a good worker or not?"

"So much to say for a young girl!" scolded Yen-yen's mother. "You won't be content until you drive me to an early grave!"

"But I really *don't* know, Ma! Never mind. I'll say whatever you want. Aunty Wu — is there any more to this nonsense? Spit it out and be done with it!"

"No. That's the whole thing."

Yen-yen's mother and Aunty Wu went to the village administration office for the letter of introduction. Wan, who had come looking for Ai-ai, waited in the courtyard until the argument was over and the two older women had left. Now he entered and stood beside Ai-ai. They gazed mournfully at their friend.

"Yen-yen, I don't know how to comfort you . . . " said Ai-ai.

"My fate is sealed. There's nothing to talk about. But what about you? Has your father consented?"

"I haven't had the nerve to ask. This is a sad day for you. We'll talk about me some other time."

"No! I'm going to see your business through! I'm not going to let you end up like me. If you succeed, it'll be a lesson to my ma. You wait here while I go ask your mother. If your father consented, today we can go to the district government together!"

Yen-yen was already dressed. She put on her shoes and flew out the door.

Wan and Ai-ai were alone.

"I don't think my father is against us," said the girl, "and I hear your parents are willing. What we have to worry about is getting the letter from the civil clerk."

"That's the way I look at it too. Anything he has a finger in must be done his way. I bet you'd get it easy enough if you agreed to marry his nephew!"

"There's no doubt about that! But what'll we do if he won't issue the letter?"

While they were still trying to think of a solution, Yen-yen returned and said that Ai-ai's father had consented to her marrying Wan! As to the letter, Yen-yen had an idea.

"Let's go to the civil clerk," she urged. "If he refuses to issue it, you can bring up the question of my letter. Ask him how can he give one to my mother, who only represents me, and not give one to you when you come in person? We'll see what he has to say to that!"

Wan nodded approvingly. "Right! If he still refuses we can go to register at the district government without it. When they ask for our letter we'll tell them the whole story and show what a feudal fogey the civil clerk is!"

"But won't you be letting Yen-yen's business leak out?" asked Ai-ai.

"So much the better," put in Yen-yen. "If the story comes from you, my mother won't be able to blame me for it."

"Suppose the civil clerk wants a matchmaker?" said Wan.

"Tell him I'm the one!" replied Yen-yen. "Let's go to the administration office. As soon as my mother comes out, we'll go in!"

Ai-ai hesitated. "What if the civil clerk says you can't be a matchmaker because your reputation is no good?"

"I have an answer to that too," said Yen-yen.

Still busily planning, they walked to the building which housed the village administration office. On the way, they met Aunty Wu and Yen-yen's mother coming back.

"We don't need you," Aunty Wu said to Yen-yen. "We already have the letter."

"I want to ask what's in it," replied Yen-yen. "When we hand it over at the district government I don't want to say anything different."

The two older women smiled with gratification at the girl's apparent cooperativeness. "If you had acted this way from the beginning you would have saved me a trip," said her mother. "Ask your questions and hurry home. I want you to have a bite to eat before you leave."

As Yen-yen's mother and the matchmaker walked away, the three youngsters entered the office. The civil clerk recognized his visitors and looked at them with unconcealed annoyance. Ignoring Ai-ai and Wan, he spoke directly to Yen-yen.

"Go on home. I've already given the letter to your mother."

"I know it," replied Yen-yen. "I've come for one for these friends."

Askance, the clerk stared at Wan and Ai-ai. "For you two?"

"For us two!"

"You'd better reflect on your wrongs!"

"We have reflected. We're both willing."

"I'm sure of that!" sneered the clerk.

"Not only that, but my father and mother are willing too," said Ai-ai.

"So are mine," Wan chimed in.

"Who's your matchmaker?" asked the clerk.

"I am," said Yen-yen.

"You?"

"Why not?"

"With your reputation?"

"What's the matter with my reputation?" Yen-yen asked. "If there's anything wrong with me why did you just give my mother a letter introducing me to the district Registrar?"

The clerk had no answer to that one and he took refuge in anger. "Beat it — the three of you!" he shouted. "You're all not respectable!"

Since the battle was obviously lost, Ai-ai let herself speak freely. "But if I married your nephew, that would make me respectable, wouldn't it?" she asked cuttingly.

Actually, the clerk had two different opinions of Ai-ai. Once, when he saw her holding hands with Wan, he said to himself, "Disgraceful! She's just the way Lovely Moth was as a girl!" On another occasion, while visiting his sister, he recommended Ai-ai as a suitable bride for his sister's son. "What kind of a girl is she?" his sister had asked. "Fine," he had answered. "Just like Lovely Moth used to be!"

In the clerk's mind there was no inconsistency in these evaluations. When he said "fine", he meant that Ai-ai was very pretty and fine to look at. When he said "disgraceful", he was talking about her conduct, for he believed that any relationship between a boy and a girl before marriage was highly improper.

However, he did not attach the same weight to "conduct" as he did to "looks". "Looks" were inherited and there was nothing anybody could do about them. "Conduct", on the other hand, could be made to conform to the husband's idea of decency by means of a good beating after marriage. In this respect, the clerk completely shared the views of the matchmaker Aunty Wu.

To get back to our story — when Ai-ai made that sarcastic comment about marrying his nephew, the clerk became so furious that he could hardly catch his breath. Savagely, he closed the cover of his ink slab. "No matter what you say, I won't write you the letter!"

"We'll go register at the district government anyway!" threatened Ai-ai. "We'll let them decide!"

"Try it and see what happens! Don't you think they know your reputation too!"

The argument raged and wrangled, neither side willing to give an inch. Finally, the angry youngsters left the office in disgust.

An hour later, after Yen-yen had had her bite to eat, they set out with Aunty Wu for the district government. It had been arranged that Yen-yen's future husband would meet her there. Disliking the matchmaker intensely, the youngsters deliberately walked at a brisk pace, making her pant behind them all the way in a futile effort to keep up.

When they reached their destination, Aunty Wu was still far behind. They waited outside the door of the marriage registration office. There were five or six other people standing around — of both sexes and of various ages — but no one whom any of them recognized. Two older people probably were matchmakers. Then there were two youths — one about twenty, the other about fifteen. The youngsters from Leaning Willow guessed that the latter must be Yen-yen's groom, for Aunty Wu had described him as "over fifteen".

But they knew they were wrong as soon as the old lady, wheezing, at last arrived. "Why isn't that child here yet?" she muttered.

A little boy came running out of the doorman's room. "Aunty," he cried to the matchmaker, "I've been waiting for you!" The

childish treble of his voice was more highly pitched than Yen-yen's own. He was a head shorter than his intended, with plump red cheeks. His bright little eyes shone like a cat's and the backs of his small chubby hands were pitted with charming dimples.

What a cute child! thought Yen-yen. But he still should be drinking his mother's milk. Why does he want to get married?

"Let's go in," said Aunty Wu.

The small office was crowded with applicants coming to formalize their marriages, and Registrar Wang was soaked with perspiration. As each couple reached his desk, he asked the same questions and received the same answers. "Name?" So-and-so. "Age?" They told him. "Are you willing?" Willing. "Why?" Because he's a good worker. It was just as Aunty Wu had said. The questions were by rote and the answers seemed memorized. After the applying couple completed their recitation, Registrar Wang presented them with a red paper certificate to which they and their matchmaker affixed their finger-prints. That was all. Except for two cases — one where the false age was too obvious, the other where the couple had been in trouble before — no application was refused.

Watching the procedure, the youngsters from Leaning Willow kept moving forward in their places on line. When their turn was reached, Yen-yen pushed Ai-ai in front of her.

"You go first!" she whispered.

Registrar Wang stretched out his hand for the letter of introduction. The little boy who had spoken to Aunty Wu, squeezed his way to the desk and thrust his paper at the Registrar. The matchmaker hadn't introduced him and he assumed that Ai-ai, being the younger of the two girls, was the one he would marry. Aunty Wu was frantic.

"That's wrong, that's wrong!" she shrilled.

"What do you mean?" said the child, puzzled. "Doesn't each of us have to have a letter?"

Young Wan pushed up beside the desk. He pointed at Yen-yen. "Yours is that one!"

The whole room exploded with laughter.

"How is it that you don't know your own girl?" asked the Registrar, handing the letter back to the little boy.

"Can I register with her?" said Wan, quickly moving next to Ai-ai. "We don't have any introduction form."

"Why don't you?"

"Our civil clerk wouldn't issue one," said Ai-ai. "He gave one to Yen-yen's mother, but when we went in person, he turned us down! He wants me to marry his nephew!"

"What village are you from?"

"Leaning Willow."

"What's your name?"

"Ai-ai."

The Registrar looked them over slowly. "And you must be Wan," he said to the boy.

"That's right."

"Who's the matchmaker?"

Yen-yen stepped forward. "I am."

"What's your name?"

"Yen-yen."

"How can you be a matchmaker?"

"Why can't I?"

"We have a report from your village that says the reputation of both you girls is no good."

"What proof do you have?" chorused Wan and the girls.

"The report says you've been friendly together for a long time."

"What's wrong with that?" Wan demanded. "If I didn't know her before, maybe I'd try to marry the wrong girl here today too!"

A roar of mirth from the other applicants greeted this sally. The Registrar hesitated.

"Since there is such a report, I'll have to investigate first," he said.

"Why shouldn't they marry?" pleaded Yen-yen. "What harm would it do anyone? They've never been married before and they're not in any trouble. There's no question about them both being willing. What is there to investigate?"

The Registrar shook his head. "No. I must investigate. That's the way it'll have to be," he said with finality. He turned to the little boy. "Now let me see your letter." The child handed it to him and Aunty Wu presented Yen-yen's introduction.

"What's your name?" the Registrar asked the little boy.

"Dan."

"What part of your teens are you in?"

But this was not the way Aunty Wu told him the age question would be asked! He was only twelve and became confused.

"Twenty-teen!"

"What do you mean — 'twenty-teen'?"

The child said nothing.

"Are you willing to marry this girl?" the Registrar asked after a pause.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because she's a good worker."

The Registrar examined Yen-yen's letter; then he looked at her.

"How old is the boy?"

"I don't know."

The matchmaker prodded her sharply. "Of course you know!"

"But I really don't!" protested Yen-yen. "You never told me!"

Not realizing that Yen-yen was acting deliberately, Aunty Wu berated her in an undertone. "How can you be so stupid!" hissed the old lady. "Suppose I didn't tell you — he said he was twenty, why couldn't you say the same?"

To her dismay, the child picked this time to show off his cleverness. "How could she know how old I am?" he piped. "We're from different villages and we never met before!"

"You made that very plain a minute ago!" snapped the Registrar. "And since you haven't seen her until today — how do you know that she's a good worker? I refuse to register this marriage! Firstly, the boy is too young to know whether he wants to get married or not; secondly, since they don't even recognize one another, there certainly can't have been any freedom of choice. Go home, all of you!"

Sadly, Aunty Wu led her charges out of the office. The little boy headed for his village and the others took the road back to Leaning Willow.

On the way home, the matchmaker scolded Yen-yen for saying the wrong thing. Yen-yen complained that the old lady hadn't given her complete instructions. Ai-ai and Wan said that the Registrar was a muddle-head, but Yen-yen insisted he had a rather clear mind.

Walking rapidly, the youngsters again put a good distance between themselves and Aunty Wu. Yen-yen stated that she would continue to do her best to help the other two, and the latter promised to see to it that young Chin would forget his differences with her. To use the language of the diplomats, they made a "Mutual Assistance Pact".

There were many in Leaning Willow besides the civil clerk who considered the girls "bad". When the news of what they had done at the district government reached the village, the elderly people said the girls were "wicked beyond words!" They meant this quite literally and dropped the reputation of Ai-ai and Yen-yen as a topic of conversation. Those who had criticized the girls in the past mainly because their keeping company with Wan and Chin made it difficult to match them with their own sons or nephews, were finally convinced that any such hope was fruitless. Gradually, they stopped chattering about the girls. Some youngsters in the village used to dutifully echo their parents' censure of Yen-yen and Ai-ai, although they secretly approved the girls' conduct. If their elders now had lost interest, they saw no reason to revive the discussion. The boys who had been competing for the affections of Ai-ai and Yen-yen were forced to realize that no one could replace Wan and Chin. What was the use of loose talk?

Moreover, the girls now had a stock question for the remaining busybodies. "What harm is there in us marrying anyone we want?" they would demand. Nobody could think of an intelligent answer. For all of these reasons, there was gradually less gossip and the girls' reputations even improved!

But because of three people, the youngsters still could not get married: Yen-yen's mother, who wouldn't give her consent no matter how her daughter pleaded; the civil clerk, who flatly refused to issue the letters; and Registrar Wang, who talked but took no action. Wan and Ai-ai went to see him several times, and each time he said, "I haven't finished my investigation. . . . "

Those who weren't opposed to the marriages did nothing to help. When the youngsters wanted to appeal to the higher authorities in the county government, they couldn't get permission from their parents to make the long trip to the city where its offices were located. And so the situation dragged on, with the civil clerk and the Registrar heartily cursed by the lovers every day.

After two months of steady cursing, there still was no change. Then, one evening during the spring planting season, young Wan stopped at the village cooperative store. The proprietor grinned at him.

"How are you getting on with your marriage?"

"The district government is still checking!"

"When do you suppose the investigation will be completed?"

"In ten or twenty years!"

"You certainly take the long view! But you won't have to wait that long now — the new marriage law has just come into effect. The way I understand it, you've been legally right all along!"

Wan thought the man was teasing him, and he only snorted. But the proprietor was serious. "It's true!" he insisted. "Take a look at this newspaper." He helped Wan read the appropriate part of the statute.

"Young Wan stumbled on the right method," nodded one of the other customers. "Go and register again tomorrow," he said to the boy. "It's completely legal!"

Within fifteen minutes, Ai-ai, Yen-yen, Wan and Chin, in accordance with their "Mutual Assistance Pact", were assembled at Ai-ai's house for a conference to discuss the latest development. Yen-yen suggested that Wan and Ai-ai register first.

"Once you've gotten your marriage certificate, my mother'll be easier to handle," she said. "Although you say I don't need her consent now, still I'd like it better if I could convince her."

They all agreed that that would be the preferable way. After the meeting adjourned, Ai-ai and Wan sat up half the night planning how to cope with any questions that Registrar Wang might raise.

To their surprise and relief, when they arrived at the district government the next morning, it turned out that their preparations were unnecessary. The Registrar issued the marriage certificate without a word!

The following day, a communication from the district government was received in the village administration office. It stated that the registration by Wan and Ai-ai was a model application of the new marriage law and requested that the district government be informed when the celebration would be held. Two cadres from the district wished to join the festivities.

An official designation of the match as "model" put matters in a different light. Except for a few die-hards, everybody in Leaning Willow now approved the marriage. The village youngsters, who had been sympathetic from the beginning, all pitched in to prepare for the festivities. A few days later, the decorating was completed.

The morning of the celebration, the two cadres arrived from the district government. They were Registrar Wang and the secretary of the Communist Party district committee. Most of the village cadres also attended. The civil clerk had decided not to come, but the district representatives said that every other one of

the village cadres could stay home if they chose, but nothing would excuse *his* absence. He came.

Because the marriage had been honored as "model", the turnout was unusually large. A great crowd packed the modest compound where Wan lived with his parents. The guests' cheerful clamor stilled as the bride and groom took their places on a raised platform. Then a youngster, who had learned the new fashion somewhere, began ribbing the newly-weds about their love affair.

"Tell us how you got your 'bad reputation'!" he called to Ai-ai.

Ai-ai stood up. "Do you want to know who I blame for that?" she asked.

"Yes!" shouted the crowd.

"I blame everyone who tried to prevent us from getting married — that's who! If we had married a year ago, wouldn't my reputation have been restored a year ago? We used to talk a lot about 'freedom of choice in marriage'; but actually who did the choosing in our village? There's not one of you here whose parents didn't do the deciding for you!"

The villagers knew this was true, though they were embarrassed to hear it discussed openly before the district government cadres. Ai-ai continued:

"When Yen-yen and I wanted to make up our own minds, the civil clerk told us to criticize our wrongs. Well, we did. What was wrong with us was that we wanted to choose our own husbands! Frankly, because of this business, I've been cursing the civil clerk for the past two months, and I want to take this chance to apologize to him."

Amused, the guests wanted to know what words Ai-ai used in her profanity. She said that now that she and Wan were married, she wanted to forget the past. They insisted. Ai-ai stood firm. Young Wan jumped to his feet.

"Let me speak!" he yelled with a grin. "I did some cursing too! Mr. Clerk, please don't be angry. I said to myself — I'm willing. She's willing. You're the only one who's not willing! What harm will it do you if we get married? Old pig-head! Dead brain! Nephew lover! You wouldn't tell her to criticize herself if she married your nephew!"

The crowd looked at the civil clerk and laughed. Silent, he hung his head.

"Do you have any comments for Registrar Wang?" the Party district secretary asked Wan.

"Registrar Wang really is a good man," replied the boy, "but he can't tell the difference between true and false. He hears people say they're willing but he doesn't care whether they say it like they mean it. Some of them were so plainly false that even I knew it — but he gave them marriage certificates! And if a person is truly willing, why does he have to ask for a reason? They only give him the memorized answer — 'Because he's a good worker'. What peasant isn't a good worker? What kind of a reason is that? Then it was our turn — and we were *really* willing. But he said a report from our village said that we had been friendly for a long time; that he would have to investigate. Doesn't the fact that we had been going together for a long time *prove* that we were willing? What was there to investigate?"

Young Wan chuckled. "I must admit we cursed you too, Registrar Wang. But don't hold it against us. From the day you issued us our marriage certificate, we haven't said a bad word against you!"

"You were quite right to curse," said the Party secretary, "and I guarantee that no one will hold anything against either of you. Those who said your reputations were no good are still a little feudal in their thinking. They must gradually correct themselves. By refusing to issue your application in order to force Ai-ai to marry his nephew, the civil clerk was interfering with your right of freedom in marriage. Now that the new marriage law of the Central People's Government has been proclaimed, any one guilty of that kind of conduct in the future will be tried before the court. Registrar Wang's endless delay in issuing your marriage certificate was bureaucratic and showed that he was unwilling to think things out. The past few days he's been reviewing his acts and criticizing himself. The entire Communist Party has pledged itself to effectuate the new marriage law. We in the district committee are studying how to do this in the best possible way, and I've come here specifically to hear your ideas on the subject."

The Party secretary addressed himself to the assembled guests. "Comrades, don't you think these youngsters were right in cursing? Think of how many marriages our village and district administrations handled wrongly these few years, how many people still must be cursing us daily! Unless we correct this situation, not only will we be disciplined by the Party, but the people are liable to curse us to death!"

After the celebration, the peasants all said that this kind of marriage was very good and that the newly-weds were sure to get

along fine. Even the old folks who used to criticize Ai-ai and Yen-yen approved. This meant an end to beatings like the one Chang the carpenter gave Lovely Moth, they said.

That evening, Yen-yen's mother saw the light. Smiling, she suggested that the next day the girl should go with young Chin to the district government and register.

Living Hell

by Chen Teng-ke

I

Fifty years ago, Newstream was a famous little market town just off the main highway from Fuyang to Huai City in northern Kiangsu. Although it consisted of only five hundred odd families, it used to be quite a thriving community. According to the old-timers, a country fair took place there four times every ten days — whenever the date contained a "one", "four", "seven", or "nine". Then the streets would be filled with people, pushing, crowding, handing money over the heads of the packed humanity to the busy stall keepers. For excitement, it was said that these fairs compared favorably with the biggest marts in Shanghai.

Day and night, a steady stream of traffic moved along the broad highway behind the market town. Ox carts, wheelbarrows, porters with shoulder poles, donkeys — all plodded and rolled in endless procession. After a good harvest, Newstream was especially hectic, with great heaps of peanuts and yellow soy beans filling the thoroughfares. Even in winter, trade continued briskly, for then, crossing the Yangtse on the big river steamers, the pig dealers came north to purchase the fattest, most succulent porkers at the Newstream market.

The town was encased in an earthen mound wall, twelve feet high. On each of the wall's four corners, rude fortifications were erected. Running from east to west and bisecting the town was the main street; in the center stood the Sun family mansion, thirty-six feet high, towering above the humble dwellings of lesser folk.

The peasants called this imposing structure "Living Hell"; just looking at it made them tremble. If a mother wanted to stop her child's tears, she had only to say, "If you don't stop crying I'll send you to Living Hell!", and the little one would immediately climb on to her lap and be as quiet as a mouse.

At the turn of the century, old Sun Hsi-chuan won a military title and a subsidy from the Manchu Dynasty. When he returned home, he built this big mansion, with an ornate ceremonial arch gate straddling its approaches. Flanking each side of the door of the compound were a huge stone lion and an impressive stone drum.

From that time on, the lot of all the peasants within a radius of ten miles of Newstream began to change. Well-to-do peasants became poor peasants; poor peasants became paupers. The volume of trade dwindled to a trickle. But the Sun family became richer every day. It built more houses, with tile roofs, and steadily increased its land holdings.

After the old man died, his son, Sun Tsai-tao, continued in power. The manor house became as influential as a magistrate's *yamen* under the Kuomintang; when the Japs occupied the region it was quickly converted into a collaborator's "Peace Preservation Association" headquarters. In the course of these changes, Sun Tsai-tao managed to bring under his control all the five hundred families living within the earthen walls of Newstream. Twenty prosperous families living on the outskirts of the town were so crushed by him economically that they were forced to move from their fine houses to little shacks. None of them could even afford to keep a dog. Two thousand *mou* of rich black earth which had belonged to various peasants, through mortgage foreclosure, robbery and treachery, became one big cake of Sun Tsai-tao; the former owners —over two hundred families — became Sun's tenant farmers. You could throw a stone down the main street without fear of hitting anyone; the place was absolutely dead.

The New Fourth Army came to Newstream in the winter of 1942, drove out the "Peace Preservation Association" and set up a people's government. Two years later, during the rent and interest reduction period, accusation meetings were held. Sun Tsai-tao, fearing that his crimes would be revealed, fled to south of the Yangtse. Redistribution of the land was completed in the summer of 1946, and the market streets of Newstream gradually came back to life, like the flowers and grass in the spring. As the plots of black soil were returned to their original poor owners, the shops in town re-

decorated their doorways and hung up their signs. New thatched huts replaced the weather beaten wrecks on the outskirts, trains of oxen and donkeys were again laden with produce. People who hadn't dared to speak for years now laughed and chatted openly. No one mentioned "Living Hell".

Then, in the autumn of the same year, came terrible news: Chiang Kai-shek had broken his agreement with the Communists and was sending four million troops to attack the Liberated Areas. It was like a death notice. Laughter was erased from the faces of the people. Peasants ploughing in the fields reined their oxen to a halt; others shouldered their hoes and returned home.

Grimly, men and women gathered together for a meeting. They decided to organize and fight; at the same meeting they established a committee to support the front. A militia, stretcher bearer teams, women to wash clothes, comfort-the-army groups and peasant mutual aid production teams were quickly organized. Youngsters of the Children's League beat drums and cymbals and made propaganda speeches in the streets; they set up blackboard newspapers and plastered the walls with pictures which they had drawn in school.

It wasn't until the Kuomintang had its nose bloodied in seven successive defeats in central Kiangsu that the Newstream committee was called into action. With several reorganized divisions, the enemy was moving toward the town on the Huai river plain. Captain Shen of the militia asked for volunteer stretcher bearers. Instantly, there was a clamorous response.

"I'll go!"

"Me too!"

"I've got a score to settle with Baldy Chiang!"

Widow Hsueh followed the example of her twenty-year-old daughter, Feng-tse, who was the first to volunteer. The old lady offered to serve as a cook. Captain Shen's father, Old Man Shen, who was over sixty, wanted to go along too. In a few minutes, three hundred and thirty people had registered; but after some deliberation, it was decided to take only two hundred of them.

A clothes washing group was selected with Widow Hsueh at its head. The group would remain in the town and wash the clothing of any soldiers stationed nearby or of any wounded in rear lines hospitals.

Old Shen was chosen to lead the mutual aid production team. It was the duty of the team to plow, plant and reap the crops of

all volunteers who had left home for the front. No one's field would be permitted to go to waste.

All having agreed to these arrangements, the peasants worked day and night to put them into operation. Wood and bamboo were sawed, rope was twisted and woven into nets for the stretcher hammocks, litters were constructed. The peasants of Newstream were the first in the district to complete their preparations.

On the evening of the third day after its organization, the stretcher bearer team set out.

II

The team had been gone for half a month. News from the front was very good and the people of Newstream regained their confidence and calm. It was as if a three thousand mile Great Wall were blocking out the enemy. Never doubting ultimate victory, the peasants continued their work as usual. Yet the incessant booming of artillery, the planes droning overhead in swift low level raids of vicious strafing, at times caused a certain amount of uneasiness. The peasants changed their schedule so that they performed their chores from sunset to sunrise. During the day they slept and kept out of sight.

One dark night, Widow Hsueh, her right arm freed from the sleeve of her cotton padded jacket, was cutting bean plants in the field. Her younger daughter, Chi, was helping. They lived on a small farm outside the town walls. Suddenly the girl stopped wielding her short sickle and peered down the road.

"Ma," she cried. "There goes a stretcher team. Do you think sister is with them?"

Widow Hsueh raised her head to watch the long line of murky figures winding their way south. "Your sister's team is at the front. These people must be from another county," she replied. "Let's keep cutting while it's still dark. There may be planes when the sun rises."

Cheerfully, the girl returned to her reaping, singing as she worked. Her sweet clear voice brought a smile of pleasure to her mother's face. Almost before they knew it, they harvested all the beans on two *mou* of land. Looking up again, they saw the last of the stretcher team going by, with three ox carts bringing up the rear. The rim of the sun had crept to the top of the bamboo grove.

"Dear, bring the wheelbarrow over here quickly so I can load it," said Widow Hsueh. "The planes will be here soon."

Flinging aside her sickle, the girl ran nimbly to the other side of the field and seized the shafts of the barrow. She raced back with it to her mother, crying, "Load, load!"

Just as she had gathered her first armful of bean vine, Widow Hsueh heard the planes. There were four of them flying in fast from the southeast. She threw herself to the ground and shouted to her daughter, "Get down on that pile of bean vine and don't move!"

The three ox carts were still creaking slowly down the road with their heavy loads of bags of flour. At the sound of the planes, the drivers rushed off the road in all directions and plunged head first into the bean and potato fields. The oxen continued to plod forward steadily.

Lying rigid, her arms clutching her head, Widow Hsueh whispered a prayer. "Buddha, don't let them see us! Make the planes go away!"

But the last plane in the formation, a fighter, sped down like an arrow, its machine gun chattering and ploughing little geysers of dust on the dirt highway. Two bombers wheeled and followed in the wake of the fighter. Opening their maws, they dropped seven bombs. One of the carts was hit and burst into flames as the earth shook with explosions. The oxen pulling the cart were killed in their tracks.

A few minutes later, Chi slowly raised her head. "Ma," she said dazedly, "where do you suppose sister's team is now? . . . "

Widow Hsueh, her face flushed and worried, made no reply. She looked at the flaming cart, at the dead oxen, then at the planes still circling in the sky. She struck her own head lightly several times with her fist.

"I'm old. It doesn't matter if I die," she brooded, "but a young girl like Feng-tse at the front . . . She could be frightened to death. . . . Why did I let her join the stretcher team? . . . "

She gazed at the two feet high bean plants, weighed down from stalk to tip with heavy yellow clusters. Anger grew in her breast and she lowered her hand. "He wants to tear out my heart," she said aloud, "but I'll rip his guts out!" It was Sun Tsai-tao about whom widow Hsueh was thinking bitterly, as she lay upon the ground. That man-eating dog killed my man and stole our land and

house. After fourteen years, the Communist Party got them back for me, but I still haven't been revenged. Now he's trying to come back. . . . Won't he kill the rest of us? . . .

Forgetting about the planes, she sat up and called to her daughter, "Dear, come over to me. I want to tell you how your father . . . . "

Chi quickly crawled to her mother's side and flung an arm about her neck. "Mama, please lie down!" she begged. "The planes will be coming back in a minute!"

Widow Hsueh blew her nose and gently wiped the dust from her daughter's face. She pulled down the girl's hand which was pointing at the sky. "You're seventeen now," sighed the old lady, shaking her head. "Your father died before you were born. It seems that we two were fated to suffer. . . ." Mouth quivering, her eyes became moist as she indicated a dense grove of trees. "Behind there, that tile roof house was built with the sweat and blood of the poor, drop by drop! 'Living Hell' — that's where your father died!"

The girl knelt beside her mother and shook her by the shoulders. "Ma, don't talk about papa's death," she pleaded, then buried her head in her mother's bosom and burst into tears.

III

Chi remembered the first time her mother mentioned the death of her father. Both of them cried for hours that day; thereafter, whenever Chi thought of it she couldn't eat. That was two years ago, in 1944 when they returned home from a little village south of Newstream. The widow hadn't dared to give all the details earlier, for Sun had been looking for her to make her his concubine, and she had feared that her daughters, being too young, might talk. In 1944 it was safe for them to return to the town, Sun having fled in the face of the grievance-telling meetings which were held during the rent and interest reduction program.

"I'll have a belly full of bitter water to spill out at those meetings," Widow Hsueh had said to her daughters.

This was the first intimation the girls had of the affair; they asked the reason why.

"Just talking of the sufferings of our family makes Mama feel smothered!" replied the widow. "It's all the work of that murdering Sun Tsai-tao! He was the rottenest man in Newstream — a wild dog. He ran the town. He was the mayor; his family owned

2,000 *mou* of land and a lumber mill. They had over a dozen toughs whose job it was to persecute people — to grab their land, their houses, their women. . . . "

"And were they the ones who grabbed Papa?" Chi interrupted agitatedly.

Widow Hsueh wiped her eyes with the hem of her tattered blue cotton jacket. "Dear, you see the black soil fields around Newstream. They all were taken by the Sun family for debt, including twenty *mou* which your grandfather had bought. It was for those twenty *mou* that Sun Tsai-tao killed — your father. . . . "

"You mean we used to live here?" Chi asked in wonderment. She had never known any home other than the little village to the south where she had been born.

"Yes, we are Newstream people. All the Hsueh family had when it settled here were a few pots and pans. After years of hard back-breaking work, they managed to scrape together enough to buy those few *mou* of land. When your father inherited it, we had an ox and a cart."

"Then we weren't poor, Ma? What happened after that?"

"Sun Tsai-tao, that black hearted dog, saw our twelve *mou* sticking in the middle of his fields. He killed your father, pulled our house down, took our land — he destroyed our family! . . . "

Chi stared at her mother's mouth for some time before she spoke again. "Ma, how did it happen?" she said at last.

"It was in September, 1929. Your father had just come home from the fields with a wheelbarrow full of bean cuttings. Chang, Sun's bodyguard, a mean bully, came in with a pistol in his hand. Cruel and nasty, he barged in without a 'by your leave'. He dragged your father away the way a hawk flies off with a young chick. . . . "

"Ma, could he do it as easy as that?"

"I was nursing your sister and I nearly fainted with fright. I put her down and ran after them to the highway. I grabbed Chang and pleaded with him, 'Master Chang, where are you taking this good honest man to?' He drew back his foot and kicked your Ma in the chest. I passed out. . . . "

Protectively, Chi placed her hand upon her mother's bosom. She huddled closer.

"Old Shen happened to come along, and he revived me. By that time your father was nowhere in sight. Later that night we heard that Sun tied him up in his big hall and beat him unconscious

three times. He said Papa had stolen his donkey. They pierced his nose with an iron wire . . . oh, my dear! . . . "

Chi jumped to her feet, her eyes white with terror. "But that was so painful! Why didn't Papa give back the donkey?"

"Of course there wasn't any such donkey. Your father was the mildest man alive; he never took a thread from anyone. How would he dare to steal a donkey from the most powerful man in town? It was all Sun's dirty scheme, Sun — may he die without children or grandchildren! He called an opium addict from town who swore that he was Papa's partner in crime. You may recover from a snake bite, but when you're 'bitten' by scum like that, all the water in the Yellow River won't wash you clean. . . . "

"But — but couldn't Papa fight the charge?"

"Dear, we had no relatives in Newstream and the Suns owned everything. Who could we complain to? They sent your father to the district magistrate. In the first day of questioning his arms and legs were broken. How could he stand it? By the evening of the third day he was so filled with agony and hate that he smashed his head against the wall of his cell. He died soon after. . . . I was already pregnant with you then. . . . Before he died he bit open his finger and wrote on his chest in blood, 'Revenge me.' . . . "

"Papa!" screamed Chi, and sobbing, threw herself rolling on the ground.

Her mother embraced Chi and rolled with her. Holding her daughter in her arms, Widow Hsueh wailed to her departed husband, "Oh my dearest, they broke your heart! You want me to revenge you, but our family is small and weak. How can an egg be used to crush a stone? The day you were buried that filthy Sun made up his mind. He came with ten armed men and dragged me to the home of that opium addict. Sun insisted that I marry him. That night, Old Shen dug a hole through the wall and rescued me. Carrying Feng-tse, I ran away to the little village. The same year I gave birth to Chi. Now, fifteen years later, the Communist Party has called us home. . . . "

Mother and daughter cried till they could hardly catch their breath. Feng-tse, weeping too, finally managed to pull them to their feet. Her head pressed against her mother's bosom, Chi kept saying fitfully, between sobs, "Ma — we must — revenge Papa!"

Thereafter, although the house and land were returned to them, their enemy Sun escaped and joined Chiang Kai-shek's bandits.

IV

Widow Hsueh talked about her husband's death frequently now. Each time she mentioned it she wept terribly, and so did her two daughters. The day she and Chi were cutting beans in the field and Chiang's planes came over she started to talk about it again. Fortunately, Chi was able to stop her before she got very far, but naturally, mother and daughter still did cry a little.

They pushed home the wheelbarrow with the bean cuttings, added their harvest to the pile in the yard, then entered the house. Chi, her eyes still damp, began to peel potatoes for lunch. Widow Hsueh lit incense and knelt before her husband's memorial tablet.

"Dying at the hands of a murderer, your soul cannot have peace," she intoned. "You must accuse Sun Tsai-tao before the King of the Dead. Plead that he be taken alive and beaten to death at Jingjiang. Don't let him come back here. Protect Feng-tse. May she save many comrades in battle. May we hold our line at the city of Jingjiang. . . . "

"Ma!" Feng-tse, her equipment loaded on a portage pole on her shoulder, rushed into the room. Widow Hsueh locked her in a joyous embrace.

"Dear! Are the murderers all dead?"

Feng-tse shook her head sadly. "Yesterday at noon our troops received orders to move."

A shiver ran through Widow Hsueh. She collapsed, paralyzed. "Buddha, . . . what shall we do?" She turned and stared at her husband's memorial tablet.

Chi dropped her paring knife clattering to the ground. She trembled with a cold chill. It was several minutes before she could collect herself to weakly greet her sister.

Feng-tse quietly sat down on a bench and heaved a long sigh. "Ai, . . . Our army comrades at Jingjiang fought wonderfully for seven days and seven nights. Enemy artillery shells ploughed the earth all around. The Yellow Dogs charged us dozens of times, and dozens of times we threw them back. We even shot down one of their planes. Yesterday morning the Yellow Dogs came sweeping in again from the south. They reached the south gate of Jingjiang, but we smashed them and made them run. Then at noon, suddenly came the order for us to move out. . . . "

"Is Sun Tsai-tao coming back?" Widow Hsueh interrupted frantically.

Before she had a chance to answer, Old Man Shen, his long pipe in hand, hastened in, panting and out of breath. "Feng-tse — has Feng-tse come back?"

Feng-tse rose to greet him. "Here I am, uncle."

"You — How is — my son?"

"He's taking a group of stretcher bearers and some wounded comrades to another village. He'll be back very soon. Don't worry."

Old Shen pulled over a small stool and sat down slowly. He struck a spark from his flint on to a taper with which he lighted his pipe. Puffing, he nodded his head and said half to himself, "It's good that everyone has come back. It is Heaven's reward to us for the virtue of our ancestors."

"What shall we do?" asked Widow Hsueh, wiping her eyes with her sleeve. Where can my daughters and I go when those no good rascals come?"

"Ai!" Old Shen stamped his foot in exasperation. "If only my son hadn't become captain of the militia we could talk our way out of it. We'd give the land back to Sun and that would be the end of it. This time we certainly won't be able to hold the Huai River basin; what chance has a town like Newstream?" Raising the edge of his new padded gown, he shook it as he sighed, "Now that I'm sixty, I finally can afford a good overcoat, but I'm afraid I won't have it much longer." Old Shen sunk his head on his chest. Frowning and unhappy, he puffed furiously at his pipe.

Feng-tse looked at him. "Uncle Shen, you turn with the least little wind. If someone says you're pale, you immediately feel sick and lie down," she said coolly. "In and around this town, over two hundred families have been given shares of Sun's land and buildings. Are they meekly going to hand it back to him without a sound? The main thing is for us to stick together. We managed to live through the Jap occupation, didn't we? And there'll be plenty of New Fourth Army men who won't leave. . . . "

"To hear you talk, you're all very tough. But I ploughed Sun's land for forty years; I know that he's a poison-dipped sword!" Old Shen clapped his long stemmed pipe under his armpit. Head down, he stalked out.

Feng-tse and Chi, carrying a wicker basket with the peeled potatoes, went to wash them in the nearby stream. Alone in the house, Widow Hsueh sat dully, tears slowly rolling down her cheeks. Her heart was weighted with a confused hopelessness.

Newstream is only ten miles on the main highway from the city, she thought. A few steps and they're here. Can the New Fourth Army men stand up against them? . . . We divided Sun's land and his houses. Won't he be angry? Won't he want to kill us? My girls and I are a thorn in his side. He killed my husband, tore down our house. He took our land, cart, ox, food, furniture — he didn't even leave us a needle. . . . Then, after liberation, when we came back, he was gone. But we used his wood to rebuild our house. We were given his ox; our land was returned to us. Will he spare us when he comes back? Ai! Maybe I'd better run away with the girls, become a beggar. . . .

"Mama Hsueh!" Young peasant Kuang rushed in to break her reverie. "Everybody is wanted at the temple for a meeting. Captain Shen and the militia are back." Without pausing for breath, Kuang whirled and ran out again.

Widow Hsueh scrambled to her feet and chased after him to the doorway of her compound. "What kind of meeting? Is everybody going?" she called, but he was already out of earshot.

Shouting for Feng-tse, she tightened her head-kerchief and hastened out the door. She panted as she followed the sunken road leading to the big temple courtyard. When she entered the enclosure, other peasants, already arrived, had broken into small groups and were whispering together.

"Our troops have dug fortifications outside the town wall," one man was saying. "They're getting ready to fight."

Some were considering sending the small children away. Others said Sun Tsai-tao had made it plain in Shanghai that when he returned to Newstream he would slaughter every living thing; not even a chicken or a dog would be spared.

"He's after my guts," said a peasant angrily, "but I'll tear his heart out!"

Many stood silent, holding their emotions in check. Widow Hsueh listened to the clamor despondently.

Then a whistle shrilled and the peasants gathered before the temple. Shen, the captain of the militia, clambered up on the altar. He smiled as he addressed them.

"I suppose you're all a little worried. Well, you needn't be! Take courage. In the old days, Sun's gang had all the guns. If they told us to face east, we didn't dare turn west. But today the world is changed. We poor people are organized, we have guns. Even if

he takes Jingjiang and Huai City it won't do him any good. The Japs were here for eight years, but we've still reduced rents and settled scores with the tyrants. Sun coming here is like the fat pig walking to the slaughter house. He's meat on the table! Tonight, we want everyone to rip up the road running west from here to Hsu Village. We militiamen will polish our rifles clean! Now go home and get your picks and shovels. The job will be done before you know it. We'll all help the army set up defense works, and then as for Sun — well, let him come!"

A group of young men leaped up, shouting, "We'll have bullets ready to greet him!"

"Whoever doesn't fight against Sun," yelled young Bu, "comes from eight generations of bastards!"

"My whole family will join!" cried Widow Hsueh, and she left the meeting with the noisy enthusiastic crowd hastening home to get their picks and shovels.

When Chi and Feng-tse learned the news from their mother, with her, they gulped down two bowls each of potato gruel, then shouldered their digging implements and locked the door of the house. The three walked quickly to the temple courtyard. They found Old Man Shen, carrying a shovel. He was pacing back and forth, confidently haranguing the peasants who were assembling.

"The New Fourth Army worked hard all these years so that we poor people could raise our heads. Do you think they'd abandon us now?" he demanded. "My son says that they're getting ready to fight. Their leaving Jingjiang was meant to lure the enemy on. I'll go with my son to join the guerrillas!"

At sunset, between two and three hundred men and women, with picks and shovels, set out from the west gate of Newstream.

V

The Kuomintang 74th division occupied Jingjiang on the afternoon of the 19th of September, 1946. On the 20th, attacking south along the Grand Canal, they took Huai City, Paoying and Kaoyu. Mad with success, the Kuomintang division commander, Chang Ling-pu, turned his men north and attacked the city of Lienshui. After eleven days of bloody fighting, on October 26th, Chang's forces were defeated. He had lost over 7,000 men, killed and wounded.

For one month, he rested his men, regrouped and added replacements. Then he again drove on to Lienshui. The New Fourth

Army was operating according to the strategy of Chairman Mao, which at that time was to fight a war of movement. Stress was laid on destroying the enemy's manpower rather than holding a particular city or area. Therefore, our forces evacuated Lienshui and then withdrew from the city of Yeting.

These moves made Newstream an important military point on the road from Fuyang to Huai City. Every day there were many intelligence reports. It was learned that Sun was returning with the Kuomintang army. Families began leaving the town and its environs; the peasants buried their grain and sent their women and children away. Shen and his thirty odd militiamen, on the move every night until sunrise, scouted and delivered messages for the army. The warriors of the New Fourth Army crouched in their trenches along the highway. The town was under the strictest martial law. Civilians were not permitted to roam about; on the streets and at the crossroads not even a dog could be seen. All in Newstream was tense, waiting with breathless expectancy for the big battle that obviously was impending.

On the night of December 23rd, one of our companies gathered in the Newstream temple. The men wore steel helmets, their fixed bayonets gleamed bright as snow, hand grenades were stuck under the belts around their waists. Standing before them, in the fitful flicker of kerosene lamps, the company commander explained the situation in a loud voice.

"Comrades, we've been waiting here in Newstream a long time, but today we have our chance to come to grips with the enemy. Three regiments of the Kuomintang 58th brigade have assembled in the Huai River basin together with two hundred odd groups of puppet militia. They are planning to join the main battle as reinforcements. We are to cut them off and be the stick that breaks the dog's hind legs! With our flesh and blood we must guarantee the victory of the new battle and completely wipe out the enemy! Have you the will to do it?"

A small young soldier leaped forward from the ranks, shouting, "I, Liu Ken-sheng, joined the Party at the front, and I'm willing to be tested again and again at the front. I have thirty-five hundred dollars with me which I entrust to the Party. If I die, let it be considered my final payment of membership fees."

"I am a Communist," roared political instructor Fei Wen-hao, pounding his chest. "I want to act in the spirit of Liu who is willing

to shed his blood for the people. I vow to be first in the attack. If I'm wounded and you comrades don't wipe out every single enemy, don't give me a glance, don't drag me in! If I'm killed this time, I have a cotton quilt, three summer uniforms and two shirts; they belong to the Party and I give them back to the Party. My colored quilt cover which I bought when I got married I give to you all to tear up and use for cleaning your rifles! Polish your rifles still cleaner, still brighter, kill still more of the enemy to revenge our fallen comrades!"

Chang, the First Platoon leader, stood up. "My leg has been in bad shape for three months now. The captain has approved that I go to the rear to rest, but I have refused. I won't leave until I've fought this battle. I swear to the Party: If we can't hold Newstream, my blood will flow in its trenches; if I die, I surely will die outside its walls!"

"I want to be in the first assault group," said soldier Hu Ching-kao. I'll either come back with an enemy machine gun or not at all!"

Lu Kan-tsai jumped to his feet. "Here is where we win medals or give our lives. I'll never be a coward. I want to join the assault group too."

Over one hundred fists rose vertically against the sky. "The enemy will perish outside the walls of Newstream!" cried the men. "We won't let them advance!"

Then the company commander leaped upon the altar. He shouted so loud his face turned red. "I make my final vow to the Party. I will defend the people of Newstream with my heart's blood! If I'm killed, let the leader of the First Platoon take my place. Comrades, our battle duty has been given us. Let's go and perform it!"

Raven-black clouds, fleeing before the fierce northeast gale, blotted out the moon and stars. In the trenches you couldn't see your hand before your face. All that could be heard in the inky night were the rushing gusts of wind. A mantle of frost covered the frozen hard trenches, which before long were to be dyed crimson with fresh blood.

From the northwest, a sharp report broke the stillness. A red signal flare rose to the sky and rolled over gracefully. It turned a glaring white and burst into a shower of brilliant streamers which dazzled the eyes. For a moment, row upon row of young silvery wheat in the frozen fields were etched with exaggerated clarity; then all melted into the night.

Squad Leader Liu Ken-sheng assembled the first assault squad on the main highway. "Comrades," he whispered, "ready with the hand grenades. The battle has begun."

An enemy howitzer shell exploded with a tremendous bang just behind Newstream. It shook the villagers from their warm bedding with a start. Immediately, dogs began to bark, pigs squealed, children cried. The sounds carried clearly to the soldiers in the trenches. Their hands on their grenades, the New Fourth Army men waited.

Then out of the pitch black night, like a swarm of locusts came lines of beaded red flame, reflecting against the sky, and the monotonous staccatto coughing of a machine gun. From all sides rifles and other machine guns rattled and popped and spat lead into the fray. Bazookas and trench mortars went into action; howitzers, field artillery made the night horrid with noise. As the shells burst and pounded, dust rained down in the peasants' earthen shacks and clay broke loose from the sides of the trenches. The pall of dust and smoke which hung over everything choked, blinded.

Through the murk, the company commander, disregarding the flying bullets, swept forward like the wind to the front line trenches. There he found Liu and his assault squad making ready to meet the enemy's attack. The captain grasped Liu by the hand.

"Squad Leader Liu, your task has been given you by the Party. No matter how heavy the enemy fire, if there's only one man left alive, he must hold our position. Will you remember?"

In the darkness, Liu pressed the commander's hand back against his chest and patted it reassuringly. "Don't worry. As long as there's a breath of life left in me, if an enemy gets beyond our trench you can cut my head off!" he grinned. He turned to his squad. "Comrades, fix bayonets. Take your grenades in your hands. No one is to fire his rifle. Let them come close and then give them the grenades!"

The commander made a brief inspection of the trench, then addressed the squad. "Comrades, between you and the enemy is a stream," he said pointing with his pistol. "The bridge over it has already been destroyed. On this line which you are holding here depends the life or death of the whole company. Remember that. Be firm and brave but not over-confident. Just hang on. When

things get tough, I'll come up around your right flank with the Second Platoon. Watch for us." With that, the commander trotted quickly to another trench off to the left.

All night, the enemy concentrated the fire of six artillery pieces on the front line trench. One of the men was blown right out of the trench on to the highway behind it. He quickly rolled back in again. At dawn, two others were buried up to the shoulders in an avalanche of mud. Suffocating, they struggled to claw their way free. Liu, who was helping to pull them out, suddenly heard the unmistakable sound of feet sloshing through water. It was the enemy, fording the stream like a swarm of black shadows. He threw two hand grenades, then jumped out of the trench.

"Comrades, charge!" he cried.

A rain of grenades flew at the approaching Kuomintang soldiers, as thirteen New Fourth Army men went hurtling forward. The enemy squad, their rifles extended, were bending low and clambering up the bank of the stream. The twenty grenades exploded in their midst and toppled them over on the land and in the water. Before those still living had a chance to return fire they were all wiped out.

Two more enemy squads followed by a platoon, charged across the stream. Artillery shells, grenades, rifle and machine gun bullets ripped into the ground, more numerous than seeds at spring sowing. The slash of stabbing bayonets mixed with the ringing of shell fragments against steel helmets. One, two, three, four enemy charges. The more we killed, the more Kuomintang bandits came splashing through the water. As the sound of clashing ringing metal increased, the groans and screams of the wounded rose in crescendo.

At last the company commander arrived with the Second Platoon, sweeping round from the right flank till it cut off the enemy's rear and prevented the attackers from bringing up reinforcements. Bugles blew the signal to charge; before long over sixty enemy bodies were bobbing lifelessly in the stream.

The Kuomintang rushed the New Fourth Army positions a total of seven times without creating a breach. When the sun cleared the horizon, the enemy ceased its artillery barrage and began to strengthen its fortifications. Only seven battered, bloody survivors remained of Liu's original squad of thirteen:

Chao's helmet was badly dented; blood dripped from the tip of one of his ears. Big chunks of cotton padding were hanging from the waist and legs of Hu's uniform. Liu's arm had been pierced with a bayonet. A steady stream of crimson trickled off his hand.

"Comrades, we've held it. The enemy has fallen back. We've shed our blood with glory," said Liu grimly.

The political instructor arrived, bringing two squads as replacements. Liu's men refused to be relieved. "We're not dead yet. There's still breath in us," they declared. We're not leaving the front line!"

A fiery ball of a sun thrust its head through the dark clouds to heighten the color of the pools of fresh blood on the ground. Cotton padding slashed from uniforms rolled idly with the wind. Between the stream and the embankment lay four crying, moaning, wounded Kuomintang soldiers. Liu crawled to the edge of the trench and called out to them in a friendly voice.

"Be patient a little longer, fellows. We're all Chinese; we've nothing against you. It's only Chiang Kai-shek we hate. He wants to sell our country to America so that he can be their pet. He made cannon-fodder out of you and wanted you to kill your own people. The stretcher bearers will be here soon and carry you to have your wounds bandaged."

Steadily, the sun climbed to the tops of the trees and burnished the house roofs. A complete hush descended on Newstream. Not a shadow of an enemy could be seen; only the peasants and the New Fourth Army men, making a cheerful racket in the trenches over the food and tea which the peasants had brought, and the men repairing the fortifications, were visible. The air was fragrant with the odor of stewed pork and steamed rice. No longer were there the flame and smoke of machine guns; instead there were eggs and peanuts thrust on the soldiers by laughing peasants who asked many solicitous questions. The boom of cannons and the bursting of hand grenades were stilled; one could hear only the scrape and thud of picks and shovels setting up new defence works.

Old Shen and his son brought a bucket of steaming snow-white rice to Liu's squad in the front line trench. "Eat it while it's hot, comrades," said the old man affectionately. "You all are Heaven's own officers and men! The life of everyone in Newstream depends on you. If Sun Tsai-tao comes back, we're goners. He'll take our land, our houses. Whatever you do, don't leave!"

The soldiers took him by the hand. "Don't worry, old papa," they said. "We'll repay your kindness with our flesh and blood."

Peasant Bu, grunting with the effort, came carrying two buckets of hot tea. "Drink, comrades," he urged the soldiers. "You had a hard night. We were trembling for fear you couldn't hold out." He looked over the trench toward the stream and noticed one of the wounded Kuomintang soldiers, groaning. Bu's eyes saw red. Grasping his carrying pole he began to climb out of the trench. "You dirty son of a bitch," he raged. "So you'd help Sun come back, would you!"

Liu's squad members pulled him back. "Take it easy, friend," they urged. "We have a generous policy to them. They were forced into being Kuomintang soldiers."

"What do you mean 'generous' ?" glared Bu. "Those dogs are plenty cruel to us when we fall into their hands. I'm going to kill the bastard!"

Only after Liu and the men talked to him for a long time did Bu finally quiet down.

Widow Hsueh and her two daughters washed clothes for the soldiers all day and helped them repair the fortifications. By evening, too exhausted to eat supper, they fell straight into bed. Two resounding crashes woke them suddenly in the middle of the night. Directly behind their house, a hill had been struck by artillery shells and was blazing brightly. The shock of the explosions brought plaster showering down inside the house and threw them out of bed. Feng-tse and her mother clutched one another in terror as the sound of bugles, machine guns, artillery increased in intensity. Widow Hsueh knelt beside the bed. She kowtowed several times and began to pray fervently.

"*Amitabha, Kuan Yin,* you are the savior of the distressed! Display your power! Protect the New Fourth Army, make Sun pay for his crimes, smash him beneath many rifles! *Amitabha!*"

At sunrise the firing had ceased, but Widow Hsueh was still kneeling, muttering prayers. Feng-tse poked her head sleepily out from under her covers. She could see the first faint rays of the sun shining in through a crack in the door. She listened. All was quiet. Cautiously she tip-toed to the door and, standing to one side of it, slowly withdrew the crossbar. She opened the door a trifle and peeked outside. Suddenly she leaped for joy.

"Ma, Ma! The Kuomintang has been beaten! People are bringing food to the trenches and young Captain Shen is helping the stretcher bearers! Quick! Look! Old Shen is here too!"

Widow Hsueh scrambled to her feet. "Dear! Really?" She rushed to the door, flung it open and flew outside. When she reached the wall of the compound, she whirled and came back, smoothing her hair and tucking in the ends of her head-kerchief as she ran. "Feng-tse," she yelled, "take those eggs out of the crockery jug and boil them. Everybody's bringing food for the boys. Hurry! I'm going to town to look after the wounded comrades!" Without entering the house, again she turned and hastened off toward the town wall gate.

At the dispensary she found many peasant women already assisting the medical officers in bandaging and feeding the wounded. The women were working so busily that perspiration stood out on their foreheads. Hastily Widow Hsueh filled a bowl with rice gruel.

"I was scared stiff. I shouldn't be coming here so late . . ." she murmured apologetically.

Sounds of firing from a distant part of the battlefield wafted into the dispensary. The wounded ground their teeth and cursed, "Cut-throat Chiang bandits! I'll live to fix you yet!"

VI

It was quiet on December 24th; the night of the 25th the enemy recommenced a general attack. From fortified positions in a little nearby village, the Kuomintang made seventeen consecutive assaults. The commander of the company holding Newstream, the commissar, the battalion staff officer and the political instructor, during a temporary lull, were in the front line trench with Liu and his squad. With pursed lips they were pouring over a map on which the staff officer had drawn a red circle.

"This village is only one-third of a mile from our position," he said, frowning. "Its fort is built up quite high. They're pressing a lot of fire power down on us. . . ." The staff officer shook his head. He stood wrapped in thought for a long while, then continued gravely, "That fort is difficult to knock out. It's surrounded by three rows of barbed wire. The enemy's front line command post is in there. . . ."

The staff officer sat down and stared blankly at the soldiers for several minutes. Finally he made up his mind. "Commander," he said crisply, "this is an order from headquarters. By tonight at seven o'clock that point must be destroyed. The fate of our army depends on it. You've got to send men to cut that wire and dynamite the fort. Get started at once. It's four o'clock already."

Before the commander had a chance to open his mouth, Liu spoke up. He had been standing beside them, listening to the discussion.

"Give the job to me," he requested. Turning to the members of his squad he shouted, "Any one who's not lily-livered, stand forward! Let's go and finish this thing off!"

As one man, every member of the squad stepped out.

The commander wrung Liu's hand. "Good! Go to it! You're a veteran battle hero!"

Rising to his feet, the political instructor saluted the squad. "Comrades, on behalf of the Party, I salute you. You are all glorious. The Party will never forget you."

The staff officer quickly rolled up his map, shook hands with the company commander. "Fine. A heavy machine gun company and an artillery battery will be dispatched here immediately to give full supporting fire cover. They will be under your command. Good-bye." Like a great fish on the crest of a wave, the staff officer swept away through the trench.

The hazy sun soon set and a heavy evening mist swallowed its last rays of light. The enemy fired flare after flare into the lowering clouds. In their listless parabola through the skies, the fiery balls illumined the bare brown trees. On every grave mound in front of their position, the Kuomintang set bright torches which lighted up the newly dug earthworks and threw back thousands of tiny rays, reflected from the particles of yellow sand. A penetrating winter wind bit into your bones.

Standing with Liu's squad in the quiet front line trench, the company commander looked at his watch. "Comrades, it's six fifteen," he said.

At that moment, the supporting machine guns and artillery opened up with a deafening barrage. Liu, clad only in a thin uniform, supported on his shoulder a chaff knife, four feet long and weighing nearly twenty pounds. "Let's go," he said softly. Seven figures crept out of the trench and forded the stream.

Before the barrage began, the enemy, worn out with two days of battle, had been taking things easy. Some were sleeping, others were slaughtering pigs or skinning cows or boiling eggs. Suddenly the shells began to fly and the Kuomintang soldiers milled around in confusion, looking for places to hide. By the time they found their rifles, Liu's squad had already cut through the first line of barbed wire. Then the enemy deluged the wire-cutters with flying lead. There were only four men left in the squad when it slashed its way through to the innermost barbed wire line. Liu raised the big chaff knife over his head and brandished it like a sword.

"Charge!" he roared.

In the New Fourth Army's front line trench, the company commander crouched over a rattling machine gun, his mouth automatically muttering, "Kill, kill, kill, kill, . . . " to the rhythm of the weapon. A few minutes later, Liu and squad member Lu, each carrying a wounded comrade on his back, crawled back across the stream.

The men heaved themselves into the trench and panted, "Report. Our mission is accomplished. All three lines of barbed wire are down."

Impetuously, the commander embraced them. "You really are . . . . " His throat constricted; he could say no more.

Liu lay in the trench with his eyes closed, only semi-conscious. Much later, he could hear the instructor saying, "It's nearly dawn, commander. We've failed to dynamite that fort three times. What shall we do?"

Liu's heart leaped within him. Groggily he forced himself to sit up. "I'll go, commander," he pleaded. "Let this be my last duty." He strung four grenades around his waist and climbed out of the trench.

Crawling over the now familiar furrowed ground, he reached the foot of the tower-like fort of the enemy. With a trench spade, he dug a small hole in the frozen sod at the foot of the tower. He placed an explosive charge into the hole. Then he rolled two hundred metres and yanked the long firing string. To his disgust, he discovered that he had failed to attach the other end of it to the firing mechanism. His chest heaving with exhaustion, he lay motionless a few moments. Wrapping his arms around his head, again he rolled back to the tower. This time he affixed the string

WANG SHIH-KO : They Set off to Join the Army

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firmly to the firing pin. He rolled away several yards, then uneasy, went back to make sure there had been no slip-ups.

Five minutes later there was a tremendous explosion and the tower leaped heavenward in a column of black smoke. The enemy holding the village scattered in confusion, like the sparks and the flying clumps of earth thrown about the countryside by the mighty burst of dynamite.

The next day, the 27th, not an enemy dared show his head. In the sky, there was only some feathery rain driven in before the northeast wind. On the 28th, at three o'clock in the afternoon, a small silver plane suddenly appeared from the southeast and circled over Newstream. Two more planes followed; then four "five headers" (four engine bombers). As the latter drew near, black objects that at first looked like swallows flew hurtling down from their bellies. Instantly a series of explosions rocked the earth. The three fighters, skimming the ground, strafed the town with raking fire. Kuomintang Yellow Dogs who had been hiding in the outlying fields for the past two days, raised their tails from between their legs, and rushed yapping toward Newstream.

With leveled bayonets, the New Fourth Army men waited for them in the trenches. From time to time they raised their rifles to fire at the swooping enemy planes, then turned back to pump more lead at the oncoming Yellow Dogs. Missiles of death were flying in every direction.

A young messenger, breathless, rushed into the front line trench. "Squad Leader Liu," he panted, "orders from headquarters. They say we've completed our delaying action; we're to move out at once. The enemy is moving up with reinforcements from three directions!" The messenger hastened off.

Liu gave his orders and the well disciplined squad complied smoothly. He divided the squad into two groups; one was to remain in the trench to cover the movement of the other to a nearby hamlet; from there protecting fire would be given until the men in the trench could join the first group.

When Liu had crossed about four hundred yards of open ground, he saw Yang, the machine gunner, go down behind him. He went back, lifted both his wounded comrade and the machine gun on to his shoulders and moved behind a grave mound. After a brief rest, he again set out with his burden. Machine gun fire ripped into his legs and brought both men to the ground.

Thirteen enemy soldiers charged toward them with fixed bayonets. "Lay down your arms," they yelled.

Yang answered with a spray of bullets from his machine gun, killing two of the enemy. Then his ammunition ran out. He searched his pockets but couldn't find a single bullet. Furiously, he rose to his feet and smashed the butt of his gun into the face of a charging Yellow Dog. But before Yang could turn around, another Kuomintang bandit drove a bayonet through his back.

Liu had fainted when the enemy bullets brought him down. He opened his eyes to see his rifle slung across the back of a Kuomintang soldier. Liu raised his head and beat his breast with his fist.

"All right, stab!"

A short little savage looked at him balefully and made several false passes at Liu's head with his bayonet. "That'd be getting off cheap," he said viciously. "We want to play with you alive!"

Beside him a big fat Yellow Dog raised his leather boot and stamped it down hard on Liu's shoulder. "Your Mother's — !" he barked hoarsely. "We'll show you some tricks!"

The Kuomintang bandits grabbed him by his wounded bleeding legs and dragged him across the hard frozen furrows toward the south wall of Newstream. A scarlet trail formed in their wake as Liu's blood seeped into the rock-like mud and froze solid. No longer aware of pain, he mustered enough strength to curse his captors.

"Do your dirtiest," he said with controlled hatred. "Some day our people are going to wipe you all out!"

Brutally, the Yellow Dogs flung him heavily against a large grave mound. "We'll let him sleep here," said one with an evil grimace. "Let's go find a shovel!"

VII

Widow Hsueh and her daughters were carrying food to the New Fourth Army soldiers and had reached the highway when two enemy fighter planes appeared. From the trench the men shouted to her.

"Get down, old mother, quick! Planes are coming!"

Her legs turned to putty and Widow Hsueh collapsed weakly beside the trench.

"Mama, they're coming! Buddha!" screamed Chi.

Feng-tse put down the bucket which she and her mother had been carrying. "Ma," she said, pulling at the older woman, "hurry! They're coming this way!"

In panic, Chi threw aside her basket. Crying "Ma!" at the top of her voice, she ran with all her might in the direction of home.

Widow Hsueh felt paralyzed. Her legs trembled so violently she couldn't get to her feet. Alternately pulling and pushing, Feng-tse dragged her mother into the trench.

"Mama," she whispered, "here come three more big ones. It looks bad. They're coming lower."

"Where's Chi?" demanded Widow Hsueh fearfully. "Where is she?"

By then Chi had run as far as the haystack. A fighter plane, with machine gun spitting, swooped after her. She fell without a sound, her legs straight.

Feng-tse, who had dragged her mother to the communication trench, saw Chi go down. Her voice shook as she said, "Ma — sister — sister . . ." then rushed across the open field and threw her arms around Chi.

Chi's eyes were already big and lackluster. From her back, blood flowed with terrible rapidity. Horrified, Feng-tse collapsed fainting in the scarlet pool.

Like long evil fish, schools of bombs sailed down from the sky. The hail of machine gun bullets chipped into the frozen ground and flung icy particles into the air like swarms of locusts.

When Feng-tse opened her eyes, she found her mother unconscious beside her. She rolled to her and embraced her, crying, "Ma! Ma. . . ."

Slowly, Widow Hsueh recovered. She had one hand on Chi's waist; the other was around the neck of Feng-tse. "Oh my darling," she moaned. "My heart, my flesh, my . . . ." She flung herself on Feng-tse's bosom.

Suddenly, Feng-tse sat up, her eyes as big as eggs. "Mama," she yelled. "Here come the planes again!" She turned and covered the prostrate Chi with her body.

Widow Hsueh looked at the face of her younger daughter. "Dearest — darling — don't leave your Ma . . ." she begged. Her voice became hoarse and inaudible.

The planes were gone and the sound of firing faded into the distance. In the rays of the setting sun, Widow Hsueh and Feng-

tse held Chi and one another in a tight knot of misery, and wept. From behind a peasant's shack emerged a Kuomintang soldier with a shovel on his shoulder. He strode over to them and grabbed Widow Hsueh by the collar of her jacket.

"Get up, old woman," he said harshly. "Come with me." He began to drag her away.

The sight of her mother in the grasp of the big Yellow Dog made Feng-tse's flesh creep. Blindly she lunged forward and wrapped her arms around her mother's legs. "Ma. . . ."

Like a devil, the Yellow Dog glared down from deepset eyes. He planted his foot against Feng-tse's breast and kicked her hard. Growling obscenities, he hauled away Widow Hsueh.

All five buttons of the woman's jacket were ripped off in the struggle, revealing the reddish pink flesh of her shoulders. Her hair came down and flew wildly before her face. She lost one shoe; four feet of undone leggings trailed from her ankles. Her mouth open wide, she gasped for breath as her hands flailed the air. She fought desperately to plant her feet firmly on the ground.

"Go on, kill me!" she panted in defiance.

The Yellow Dog, as big as a bear, was pulling her by the left arm. Without turning around he proceeded across the frozen fields at a rapid pace to the big grave mound. There he halted. Taking the shovel from his shoulder, he stabbed it viciously into the ground. He pointed at the Fourth Army man.

"Bury him."

Widow Hsueh stared at the intended victim. A cold chill ran up her spine and her eyes blurred. The sky seemed to revolve, the earth to move, as her brain whirled, her heart skipped a beat. Then her legs buckled beneath her. She sat down abruptly.

"Dear — Heaven. . . ."

Grasping the widow by her disheveled hair, the big Yellow Dog cruelly yanked her to her feet. "Your mother's — ! Stop pretending! Get up!"

Widow Hsueh held her head with her hands and looked at the grey clad soldier lying at her feet. She recognized him. It was Liu, the squad leader. "You . . ." she choked and dropped to her knees besides his battered legs.

The short fat Kuomintang soldier jabbed her in the back with the butt of his American rifle. "Mother's — ! Get up! Get up!" he

grated. "You pity him? The Devil can marry you to him when you go to hell together!" Again he struck her with the rifle butt.

Liu raised his head and weakly pounded his fist on the ground. "She's older than your own mother," he said angrily. "Let her alone. Come on and kill me!"

Fatty kicked him. "You'll die soon enough!"

"Get up!" yelled the big Yellow Dog, hitting the widow across the thighs with the shovel. "Get up or I'll kill you, you old baggage!"

"Please, old mama," said Liu, beseechingly, "Dig, I beg you. . . ."

Widow Hsueh attempted to rise. "You . . ." she said, then collapsed again.

The two Yellow Dogs seized her arms and lifted her to a standing position. They thrust the shovel into her hands.

"Dig! Dig, or we'll beat you to death!"

With trembling hands she held the shovel, staring first at the prostrate Liu, then at the beasts in yellow uniforms. Slowly she dug the shovel into the ground and with great effort managed to raise half a spadeful of earth. As tears fell from her eyes on to the handle of the shovel, her body went limp and the earth slid off the spade, back to its original resting place. The soldiers beat her across the back and shoulders with their leather belts.

Dully mumbling "*Amitabha* . . . ," she again dug up a clump of sandy glittering soil about as big as an egg. She blinked her reddened eyes in Liu's direction, then flashed a glance of hatred at the two Yellow Dogs standing behind her. She set her teeth; great beads of perspiration rolled from her face.

The shovel was brand-new and extremely sharp. With one stroke it could cut through a young sapling. But in Widow Hsueh's hands it felt heavier than a sledge hammer. She could scarcely lift it off the ground. Though her tears and perspiration had soaked the lapel of her jacket, all she had dug was a narrow trench four feet long, so shallow that if you stood in it, it would barely cover your ankles.

Impatiently, the Kuomintang bandits threw their rifles on the grave mound and snatched the shovel from her. With curses, they punched her reeling back, then set to digging themselves. After scooping out a small pit, they tapped Liu on the head with shovel.

"This is it. Come on."

Liu looked at the shaking widow, then at the Yellow Dogs pointing the shovel at him menacingly, like judges pronouncing sentence. He crawled into the pit.

"Start burying," he laughed coldly. "China's millions will revenge me!" Face downward, he rested his head on his arms and closed his eyes.

Swaying weakly, her hands wide, Widow Hsueh shook her head. She began to move forward, to throw her arms around the wounded Fourth Army man, when one of the Yellow Dogs drove her back with a hard blow of his fist.

Pointing at Liu, he cursed, "Your mother's — ! You're two of a kind! Bury him!"

Her mouth moved wordlessly as tears streamed from her eyes. In a daze, she mechanically spaded the loose earth back into the pit. *Kuan Yin*, she breathed in silent prayer, these two Yellow Dogs are worse than the Japs. Drop a bomb from Heaven and kill them! Save the life of this Liberation Army soldier and I'll have three operas sung for you in the temple. . . . I'll never eat meat again. . . .

The fat Yellow Dog glared at her with his piggy eyes. Snatching the shovel from her he snarled, "Mother's — ! What do you think you're doing — planting flowers? Get out of the way!" Furiously, he covered the recumbent Liu with earth and stamped it down. "Old woman, you're responsible for this body," he warned, shaking his finger at the widow. "If he should disappear, we'll kill you and your whole family!"

The big Yellow Dog pulled his companion by the shoulder. "Come on, he's not going to fly away. If the burying doesn't kill him, one night out here in the cold will freeze him to death. He's a goner."

Slinging their rifles across their backs, the Kuomintang bandits burrowed their heads in the collars of their military greatcoats, and hurried off, against the wind, to the walls of Newstream. The moment they were gone, Widow Hsueh desperately grabbed the shovel and dug out the two clumps of earth covering Liu's head. Then she threw the shovel aside and ran.

VIII

In the time it takes to cook half a bowl of gruel, Feng-tse revived from the faint she had gone into when the Yellow Dog

kicked her. She could see that Chi was still breathing, but her mother was nowhere in sight. Beating her hands upon the ground, she cried violently and long. At last she arose. She lifted her dying sister from the pool of blood and carried her on her back into the house. From the kitchen, she brought an armful of dry grass which she spread upon the floor. She covered the grass with a mat from the bed and gently laid Chi on the mat. Taking a white glazed wine cup from the cupboard, she filled it with peanut oil. In this improvised lamp, she inserted two cotton wicks which she lit. Then she placed the burning lamp at Chi's feet. At Chi's head, she put a bowl of barley with two red chopsticks. The ritual materials for the dying in order, Feng-tse sat on the floor beside her sister and wept bitterly.

When Widow Hsueh reached the haystack and found that the girls were gone, she hurried to the house. The sight of the food and lamp for the journey to the next world struck her like a blow. She knelt heavily beside Chi and placed one hand on the girl's mouth and the other on her heart. Her eyes glazed with misery, the widow shook her head. Her lips moved without sound. Then she burst into tears and threw her arms around her daughter, showering kisses on her face.

After a while, the mother composed herself a little. "Dear, she's still alive," she said to Feng-tse. "Her heart is still warm and beating. Get the blanket from the bed and cover her. . . ."

Feng-tse looked at her mother. Both began to cry distractedly. The widow rolled on the floor in hysteria, her head banging against furniture until she nearly lost consciousness. Feng-tse finally managed to hold her mother still in her arms.

"Dear — you're a woman," said the widow dully. "You won't be able to revenge our family. When Mama dies, her spirit will wander; her ghost won't be able to close its eyes. Mama wants . . . . " Again she pounded her head against the leg of the table.

Feng-tse hugged her mother tightly to her bosom. "Ma! If we live, there's always hope. The New Fourth Army men will avenge us. . . ." To her surprise, her mother jumped up, pushed her aside and rushed for the door.

The girl ran after her and grabbed her. "All the men have gone off to be stretcher bearers, Ma! There's nobody in the village but Yellow Dogs. Where are you going? You . . . . "

"Let me go, dear," the mother ordered. "I just remembered. I've got to chase our little pigs out of the pen into the fields so that the Kuomintang won't get them."

Feng-tse held her tight. "With sister the way she is can you still think of pigs?" she asked incredulously.

Widow Hsueh coldly pushed her aside. "She's dying, but I still have to live. . . ."

"Those pigs are your life," said Feng-tse flushing, her voice hoarse with anger. "After I die too, you can live with them for a family!" Indignantly, she returned to the house.

Actually, her mother's interest in the pigs was all pretended, the only poor excuse she could think of on the spur of the moment. Feng-tse's remark about their being avenged by the Fourth Army had sharply reminded Widow Hsueh about young Liu, buried and exposed to the cold. She was ashamed to tell her daughter that she had helped to bury him, however much under duress, and at the same time she felt she had to go to him, to try to help him. If she could only make him live, it would wipe out the terrible thing she had done to him and also, somehow, ease the pain of the loss of her darling Chi. Moreover, he represented the New Fourth Army.

"Without the New Fourth Army, there'd be no Hsueh left alive in Newstream," muttered the widow. "If he dies, Heaven will call me ungrateful, returning evil for good. If I can save him . . . . At least I must go and speak to him. . . . "

Driven only by a sense of urgency, planless, numb with the emotional shock of Chi's destruction, Widow Hsueh stumbled through the dark toward the big grave mound near the town wall. Several shots rang out and she flattened herself against the wall of a neighbor's farm compound. Are the Yellow Dogs coming out? she wondered fearfully. But after a long period of silence, she cautiously stuck her head around the corner of the compound and looked toward the town wall. There was no one in sight.

In the distance against the outline of the big grave mound, she could see a heap of earth and a black head sticking out of it. Joyous with relief, she circled the mound from the north, then dropped to all fours and crawled carefully toward the heap of fresh earth.

"Comrade, are you all right?" she whispered. "Is your wound painful?"

When he had joined the Party, Liu had taken an oath to shed his blood or die, if necessary, for the people. Thereafter, he demonstrated his courage not only on the battlefield, but even when he was being buried, he had calmly rested his head on his arms. This latter act had saved his life, for it created a small pocket of air which sustained him until Widow Hsueh had removed the earth from his head.

Lifting his face, he had breathed deep; he no longer felt buried. Gradually he worked his hands free. He had laboriously scraped away the earth from his head, neck and shoulders, when Widow Hsueh arrived.

Liu stretched forth his hand to grasp a lock of the grey-streaked black hair which hung over the widow's cheek. "Mama," he said softly, "scrape the dirt off my legs. I think my shin bone is hurt. The wound in my thigh is only a flesh wound. The wounds won't kill me, but I'm afraid I'll starve to death. I've been wanting a drink of water for a long time. . . . "

Widow Hsueh rose hastily and ran back to the house. Out of their meagre provisions, she heated a bowl of rice gruel.

"Ma, how can you be so hard-hearted?" demanded Feng-tse. "She is dying and you cook gruel!"

"I'll eat this while I watch the pigs in the field," her mother explained.

Feng-tse began to cry afresh. Widow Hsueh placed the gruel in a jug and hurried back to Liu.

"Here, comrade, drink," she said, proffering the jug.

Liu's mind had been wandering. He looked at her through blurred eyes. Forcing himself to concentrate, he held her hand. "Mama, you . . . " he muttered gratefully.

Widow Hsueh supported his head. "Go on and drink, comrade," she urged. "We're all in the same family. . . . "

As he gulped the gruel, she scraped away the earth covering him. "Where are you from, comrade?" she asked him warmly. "Tonight, after the Yellow Dogs leave, we'll send you home. All right?"

Liu shook his head. "I'm from Anhwei Province, Mama. That's over six hundred miles from here. When I was three, my father died; my mother died when I was seven. Our land and house were taken over by a distant relative. I worked for him as a shepherd. He beat me — I don't know how many times. I ran away to join the

New Fourth Army when I was thirteen. I've been in the revolution five years. . . . Mama!"

Weeping, Widow Hsueh heaved a long sigh, "Ai! The bitterness we poor have suffered!" She picked up her jug and returned home.

IX.

Seated on the door step, her hands supporting her chin, Widow Hsueh leaned back against the door frame. She stared misty-eyed in the direction of the grave mound and thought darkly: If all the Yellow Dogs would die tonight, tomorrow I could bring him home and nurse him back to health so he could go back to the Army. . . .

She rose and walked toward the mound. But as she drew near, she could see the gleam of the bayonets of the Yellow Dogs, patrolling back and forth on top of the town wall. Sighing, she returned to the door step. She knew that in every little village and hamlet for miles around you couldn't spit without hitting a Yellow Dog. What could be done? She cried in helpless frustration.

Then, from the northeast a biting wind began to blow, bringing with it flakes of thick white snow which danced before her eyes. Widow Hsueh jumped to her feet in alarm and her face turned pale. The snow laid its mantle as far as the eye could see. She resolved to tell Feng-tse, to have her help carry the New Fourth Army man home.

She hurried into the room. "Feng-tse, dear, come with Mama . . ." she started to say, then caught herself. Where could they hide him? If the Yellow Dogs came, wouldn't they kill them all anyhow? If I tell Feng-tse that I buried a New Fourth Army man alive and if she should tell it to anyone else, people would curse me to death! I wouldn't be able to face a soul! She turned from Feng-tse and softly sat down beside Chi.

Keeping her eyes down, Feng-tse said quietly, "Mama, you get stranger all the time. We're the only family left outside the town walls. All the others have gone off with the militia. Chi is dying and the Yellow Dogs aren't leaving; sooner or later landlord Sun will come back. We don't know whether we're going to live or die, and all you can think of is those two little pigs. What use are they? . . ."

"Dear, you don't understand!" interrupted Widow Hsueh in agitation.

But she still didn't have the courage to tell Feng-tse the truth. She went to the door and looked outside at the snow, falling more heavily now. The early young wheat was completely buried. Her heart pounded within her. Without a word, she rushed out into the night.

Liu felt much better after having drunk the rice soup. As he peered at the dark shadows of the enemy patrolling the walls of Newstream, anger surged through him. "Don't be so damn cocky, you bastards," he muttered. "If I had a rifle I could pick you off easy!"

He turned his head and could see Widow Hsueh coming toward him in the distance. She darted out of sight behind a thatched hut. That old lady is better to me than my own mother, he thought affectionately. If I come out of this alive, I'd like to adopt her as my mother. She's a fine woman.

Painfully, he rolled over on his back and tied his wounds tight with his puttees. He flexed his legs experimentally, then laughed. "My thigh bone isn't broken. If it's only the shin bone, a month in the hospital will fix me up. I'll be able to use a gun again. I'll show those Yellow Dogs. . . ."

But then the gusts of snow began to blow against his face and chest. "Ah!" he sighed. "I can't control the weather. I've got no wings to fly out of this hole; I can't even crawl away. One night exposed to this cold and snow will kill me the same as an enemy bullet." Despondently, he closed his eyes.

Like goose down, like fleecy cotton, the white snow capped his black hair and printed designs on his grey uniform. The penetrating wind bit into his bones and chilled him into violent shivering. He felt sick and began to vomit. The blood from his wound, soaking his trousers and the earth beneath it, congealed to weld the two together into one crimson chunk of ice. Yet as the snow continued to cover him deeper in the pit, he took courage.

"I've received the regimental decoration for bravery, I've gone through shot and shell. Am I afraid of a little snow? Am I afraid of death?" He shook his fist at the sky. "Snow! Let's see how much you've got!" Liu sunk his head on his shoulders and lay resigned in the snowy pit.

Widow Hsueh gained confidence as she approached through the blinding snow, for she knew it closed the eyes of the Yellow Dogs in Newstream and locked them in the narrow confines of the

town. But at the big grave mound when she stared at Liu, covered with white, her heart sank. Dropping to her knees, she held his head to her bosom, her tears falling on his snowy face.

"Comrade," she whispered, "how are you? Are you all right?"

Liu looked at her hazily for a long time, then suddenly wrapped an icy hand around her neck. "Mama," he mumbled, his lips frozen, "Don't forget — I'm from the Yellow Sea Brigade, Second Company, assault squad, my name is Liu Ken-sheng. When the New Fourth Army comes back to Newstream, tell them I didn't disgrace them when the enemy buried me alive in this mound. . . . Mama — remember . . . . "

This made the widow weep still harder and she clutched him tighter to her breast. "Comrade," she cried, "are you — very cold?"

He pointed all around the horizon. "Look Mama, villages afire, everywhere. The enemy surrounds us like a wall. What hope is there? I know what's in your heart, but you'd better go back."

"Com — comrade . . . I want . . . . " She was sobbing so bitterly that she couldn't speak.

Liu put both arms around her neck. "Mama, I'm in the people's army. Today I've seen the people's love even more clearly. Leave me. It's snowing harder."

Crying "comrade, comrade", she hugged him desperately, but he dropped his head and said no more, though she called his name several times. At last, she gently laid him down and rose on trembling legs. She gazed blankly into the pit, then heaved a long sigh.

"Buddha must be blind. There are so many good people he doesn't save." Slowly she turned and started to walk away. But after taking four or five steps, she came back, removed her long cotton-padded overcoat and placed over Liu.

"I'm going home to call my elder daughter. The future looks black for her and me. If we can't save you, then we'll die with you!" Widow Hsueh pulled the cotton-padded gown so that it would fit snugly over Liu's head.

Liu grabbed her by the arm. "Mama, this is the coldest time of the year. Covering me with your gown will make you freeze to death, and it won't save me either. Take it back."

Widow Hsueh tugged at his hand. "At my age, comrade, it doesn't matter whether I die or not, but you'll be useful in the future. Let me go."

"Mama, I can't let you harm yourself. . . . "

She pried loose his fingers and stood up. Deftly, she brushed off the snow which already was covering the gown. Her teeth were chattering. "Comrade — wait for me. . . . I'll be back. . . . " She disappeared into the night.

X

Vibrations from exploding artillery shells had formed cracks in the roof, through which the northeast wind blew whisps of icy snow. The snow showered continuously on the upturned face of the dying Chi. Feng-tse tried to stop the cracks with reed stalks, while she mumbled angrily about her mother's apparent neglect.

Suddenly, Chi threshed violently with her arms and legs. In a panic, Feng-tse dashed to the stove and ladled half a dipperful of rice gruel from the pot. She poured it into Chi's mouth but it ran right out again. Feng-tse threw away the dipper and, crying, embraced her sister.

It was in this position that Widow Hsueh found them. Her thin garments were soaked through with snow and were dripping when she came into the room. She threw herself down beside the girl and wrapped her arms around Feng-tse.

"Listen to me, dear," she blurted. "Never tell anyone that your mother . . . . "

Feng-tse felt goose pimples forming all over her. "Ma, — you — what do you mean?"

"Not so loud," cautioned Widow Hsueh, covering Feng-tse's mouth with her hand. "Today when those Yellow Dogs dragged me away, they made me dig a pit and bury a comrade alive! I didn't dare tell you. I was afraid if you let others know, people would say I . . . . "

"Where is his body buried?" interrupted Feng-tse, leaping to her feet. Her face was as dark as a thunder-cloud.

"He's not dead yet. He's buried in that big grave mound of the Yang family." The widow shook her head. "But the way it's snowing if we don't get him out quickly, he'll die soon. He can hardly talk now; his face is purple, his lips are black, he's weak. . . . "

"Quick! We'll carry him home in the big wicker basket and warm him by the fire!"

Widow Hsueh caught her by the sleeve. "We can't, dear. Where could we hide him in this tiny house? Tomorrow the Yellow Dogs will come and kill him anyhow."

Feng-tse looked blank for a moment. Then, blinking with excitement, she blurted, "How about Jya Lao Village? We could take him there to the militia!"

Again Widow Hsueh shook her head. "It's no use. Today the Yellow Dogs are like locusts. Every village is full of them. Can you see any village that isn't on fire? Where in the world would we find militia? There isn't a place within ten miles where you can safely put your foot down!"

Grimly, Feng-tse took the wicker basket from the kitchen. "Let's bring him home first. We can dig a hole under the bed and hide him there. When the storm is over, we'll send him on."

Widow Hsueh leaned tiredly against the door frame. For a time she was silent, then she said, "Before they left, the Yellow Dogs warned me that if he's not there tomorrow, they'll come after me. They'll find him here and finish us all."

She looked out at the snow, then lay down beside Chi. "Dearest, why are you lingering on? Haven't you suffered enough?" said the widow softly, and burst into tears.

Sighing, Feng-tse walked out into the small courtyard. It was snowing harder than ever. Then her heart flamed within her like dry tinder under a spark. Her eyes shining like two lamps, she rushed back into the house and embraced her mother.

"Ma, if you're really grateful to the New Fourth Army, you can save that comrade by cutting off a piece of your flesh!"

The widow looked at her, bewildered. "Dear — what are you saying?"

Feng-tse gazed tenderly at the face of her younger sister and began to weep. Burying her head against her mother's bosom, her words were muffled. "Ma, you never had a son; only two useless daughters. We couldn't revenge Papa. . . . But if you really want revenge and at the same time to repay some of the wonderful kindness of the New Fourth Army, you should . . . . ." Feng-tse was crying so hard she could not go on.

Frantic, her mother lifted the girl's head. She fixed her fascinated eyes on Feng-tse's lips. "Go on! Finish! Finish what you're saying!"

Feng-tse wiped her eyes. Pale, with downcast gaze, she was barely audible. "Exchange Chi for him!" she breathed, then threw herself, sobbing, on her sister's body.

Her lips trembling soundlessly, the widow stared, round-eyed, at Feng-tse. She walked two shaky steps toward the door, then whirled and threw her arms around the girl. "Dear," she wept, "you — you know what I went through to bring you two up. . . ."

Feng-tse rested her head on her mother's shoulder. Her eyes full of tears, she said, "If it weren't for the New Fourth Army, none of us would be alive today. Do you want to just sit here and wait for Sun to come back and kill us like he killed Papa? Sister is dying, but through her we can avenge Papa and ourselves. Ma, have you seen her wounds?"

The widow was caressing Chi's cold hand. Raising it to her lips, she kissed it lovingly. "Your father died two months before you were born," she moaned. "My heart, my flesh. . . . His bad luck and sufferings were continued in you. . . . " She rose and paced back and forth beside the prostrate girl. Seventeen years of bitterness poured out of her heart. "I gave birth to you on the third day of the eleventh month. . . . Everywhere was snow — icicles. . . . We were in a barn; I had no hot pepper soup and had to make tea out of soot on the pan. From the time you were a foot tall, I washed you and wiped you and fed you. . . ."

She walked to the door. Dazzled by the blinding snow, she seemed to see her husband standing before her. He was drenched with fresh blood; his legs were broken, his arms had been wrenched out of their sockets; one side of his head was crushed-in where he had battered it against the wall. He was bleeding; his eyes stared wildly; his teeth cut through his lips.

Her senses reeling, the widow collapsed to the ground. Landlord Sun was pointing a gun at her head, forcing her before him! When Feng-tse, quickly kneeling beside her, tried to lift her up, she flailed her arms and cried hysterically, "Go on, kill me! You've killed my whole family! You — "

"Ma, it's me!" cried Feng-tse, grasping her mother's hands.

Gradually, recognition crept back into the widow's eyes. Weeping, she hugged Feng-tse with a fierce intensity. One by one, the events of the past seventeen years flashed through her mind. She unclasped Feng-tse's hands, stood up and walk-

ed to the door. The snow fell in huge flakes against her bosom, but her heart flamed hotly within her. Chi, she thought. If I replace her with a New Fourth Army man, he can take away Sun's gun — revenge us — I . . . . She turned to Feng-tse.

"Dear, get the wicker basket! . . . "

Feng-tse stared at her in disbelief. "Ma, do you really . . . ?"

Setting her jaw, the widow brought the basket from the kitchen herself. She removed the bedding from Chi's body. "Let's go!"

Feng-tse steeled herself and placed Chi into the basket. She affixed a carrying pole. Then she went weak all over and fell sobbing to the floor.

"Dear, you never saw what they did to your father!" said the widow. "Think of what Mama has suffered. Put the pole on your shoulder. . . . "

Tears streaming from their eyes, their hearts beating fast, mother and daughter slowly staggered forward with their burden. They fell many times, but at last they reached the big grave mound and set down the basket. Widow Hsueh removed the cotton-padded gown and put her hand on the figure in the pit. She sat down abruptly in the snow.

"He's not breathing!"

Feng-tse felt his face and heart. "He's still breathing a little, and his heart is warm. Hurry!"

Agitatedly, the widow removed Chi's flower-patterned jacket and red striped vest. She planted an agonized kiss on the girl's bare white chest. Feng-tse dressed Chi in the grey uniform she had stripped from Liu. Then she gently lifted the girl from her mother's arms and placed her in the snow-filled pit. Chi lay straight and stiff. A little puff of cold air escaped her lips. The dying girl's glazed eyes seemed to be looking at her mother and sister. Feng-tse pressed her eyelids closed.

"Chi, my dearest," wept the stricken widow, "living, you are a branch of the Hsueh family tree; dead, you become a family spirit. By taking the place of a New Fourth Army man, you will revenge Papa and help Mama repay her debt of gratitude. Yours is an honorable burial. . . . "

A rifle cracked twice and bullets whistled over their heads. Widow Hsueh picked up the shovel.

"Hurry, Feng-tse! Put her clothes on him!"

Moving quickly, they buried Chi and carried Liu home in the wicker basket.

XI

The day the Kuomintang came back to Newstream, the people all faded away and the smoke stopped rising from the chimneys. By the next morning, a fall of two feet of snow had made the rivers, the gullies and the ground one level stretch of white. The roads were deserted; the only signs of life were a couple of forlorn magpies, with their heads under their wings, perched on a tree top.

Poking and feeling his way with a stick, Old Man Shen arrived at the Hsueh house soon after daybreak. He began complaining querulously the minute he crossed the threshold.

"The wolves always attack the sick ducks first! It had to be poor Chi that got wounded!" He coughed. "Twice I started to come out last night, but I didn't dare. I was afraid they'd fire at me from the town!"

Widow Hsueh handed Feng-tse the bowl from which she had been feeding gruel to Liu. She took the old man to one side and whispered the events of the previous night into his ear.

His mouth agape, Shen turned scarlet with astonishment. When he finally regained enough possession of himself to speak, he said, "Tell everybody that he's Chi. Bind up the wound on his head and don't let anyone go too close to him. I'm going to call a couple of friends so that we can talk this over; it's no joking matter! How are his wounds?"

"There's only a flesh wound on his head," said Feng-tse softly, "but his legs are badly hurt. A bullet has gone clean through his left thigh; there is a hole as big as a finger tip. He's lost a piece of flesh from his right knee cap the size of a chicken egg. He has two small holes in the calf. We don't dare to touch him!"

"He was frozen so badly!" sighed the widow. "He still can't speak!"

"But his mind is clear," said Feng-tse, pressing her arm.

Just then Liu opened his eyes. He looked at Widow Hsueh, at the girl's jacket which he was wearing. . . .

Shen nearly burst with the blood rushing to his face. "Don't move him! I'll go get Bu. He was wounded in the leg by the puppets two years ago! He knows about these things!" He picked up his stick, and without pausing to rest his backside on the bench for an instant, he rushed out.

When he returned with the young peasants Bu and Li, the widow and Feng-tse had finished washing Liu's face and making him more comfortable. Bu looked at Liu's wounds, then grinned.

"It's not serious. The thigh bone isn't broken."

Old Shen clasped his hands and made three obeisances toward the sky. "Heaven be praised!"

But Li wasn't quite convinced. He felt Liu's thigh and then his own. "Make sure now," he insisted. "The bone's exactly in the middle of the thigh.

"If the bone were broken, it would be obvious," said Bu. "If we can't feel any pieces under the flesh, then it's definitely all right."

"Praise Buddha, this is a reward for our ancestors' virtue!" Widow Hsueh prayed gratefully.

Happily, Feng-tse came running back from the kitchen. She had been waiting there while the others were making the examination.

"I'll need boiling hot water," Bu said to her, and turning to the widow, he asked, "Would you get your sewing box? We'll boil a piece of soft cloth to wash his wounds."

"Were you able to cure your wound by washing it?" asked the widow incredulously.

"No," replied Bu, "but you have to wash it first. Afterwards, I used a home remedy of dried lily flowers, red saffron plant and fish heart grass boiled into a paste. It killed the poisons. In a few days you could see a big improvement."

"Sometimes the home remedies are better than what the Western needle doctors use," agreed the widow.

"I've got the herbs at home," said Bu. "My grandmother gathers them every year."

"Lower your voice, Ma," Feng-tse cautioned. "It disturbs him."

When the cloth had been boiled, Bu washed the wounds gently. "You must do this twice a day to keep the wounds clean. Be sure to use boiling water to wash the cloth. Don't let any dirt get in. That's what they told me at the hospital. And this room also must be kept clean."

"Where's the broom?" asked Old Man Shen, walking into the kitchen. "I'll sweep."

"You must forget about your modesty for a while," Li said to Feng-tse. "Make sure that his wounds are washed every day."

A group of neighbors who had heard the news about Chi being wounded came crowding into the small room. One old lady looked at the figure lying on the bed and recoiled in surprise.

"Oh, my poor dear," she cried. "In one day you've gotten so terribly much thinner!"

Old Shen took Bu by the elbow. "Hurry and bind her head. We don't want her catching a draft." He turned to the newcomers. "All of you go along now!" He shooed them out the door.

Li and Bu gave the wink to young Tuan, Old Shen's younger son, indicating that he should remain behind. Then they drew him into the kitchen and whispered with him for several minutes, after which they came out and stood by the bedside.

"Don't worry," they said to Liu. "You'll be safe here. . . ."

Shen had gone into the courtyard to answer a call of nature. Before he could finish his business he saw three Kuomintang soldiers approaching. They were singing and carrying rifles slung across their backs.

"Yellow Dogs!" yelled the old man, red in the face, as he rushed back into the house.

The peasants broke into a cold sweat.

The first Yellow Dog poked his head in through the door, then drew back and flattened himself against the wall of the house. They could hear him pulling the bolt of his rifle.

"What are you doing in there?" he shouted. "Come out, all of you!"

The peasants gathered in a tight protective knot around Liu. Coughing, Old Man Shen walked to the door.

"There's a girl here who was wounded yesterday," he said with tears in his eyes. "She's very sick. . . ."

A short Yellow Dog entered the room and pushed the peasants aside. He looked at the figure on the bed. "Huh!" he snorted. "She won't live long! Let's go!" he said to his cronies. The three Yellow Dogs swaggered away.

Liu opened his eyes wide and stared from face to face at the friends surrounding him. With an effort he sat up and threw himself on Widow Hsueh's bosom. "Ma! . . ." he said. A few tears rolled down his cheeks.

Soon everyone had gone except Old Shen. In a low tone, he warned them solemnly, "This is a very serious business. From now on we all must call him 'Chi', so that there won't be any slip-ups! Remember!" Then he too departed.

XII

After the Yellow Dogs occupied Newstream, Sun was appointed district commissioner. Over the entrance to Living Hell he hung a large wooden sign bearing the title of the puppet district government office. Every day for eighteen days he conscripted men, women and children to do forced labor in two feet of snow. They were compelled to build three earthen walls around Newstream and seventeen blockhouses of various sizes. Within a two mile radius of the town all trees thicker than a rice bowl in diameter were cut down. The Kuomintang dug in the peasants' courtyards and turned everything topsy-turvy looking for concealed weapons and grain. Newstream again became a jail.

But when, in the battle of Subei, the Kuomintang 69th, 26th, 11th and 57th divisions were destroyed — 24,000 men killed or wounded — the Yellow Dog garrison in Newstream was ordered elsewhere. Only one company remained behind to supplement the fifty odd puppet police and puppet militia. One night their sentry lines were penetrated twice by the people's guerrillas. The reactionaries became panic-stricken. From then on, every day before dark, the drawbridge over the moat that ran around the town wall was pulled up; when the nervous defenders weren't firing machine gun bursts into the night, they were setting off flares. If the wind so much as rustled the grass in the surrounding countryside, immediately the lights in every one of the thirteen blockhouses were extinguished and no one in them uttered a peep. The peasants didn't know the real reason for all this fear, but they could see that there was something wrong with the Yellow Dogs.

One morning, Bu and Li were sunning themselves on the eastern slope beside Shu's compound. As they chatted, Old Man Shen came hurrying toward them from Widow Hsueh's house. Inch long icicles hung from his sparse mustache and welded it together with the cotton which straggled from the tattered ear flaps of his cotton-padded "dog's head" hat — so called because its flaps had such a comic resemblance to the long ears of a hound dog. Shen's quilted blue cloth jacket was open, exposing his bare chest, though his neck already was blue with cold and his skin was covered with goose pimples. His long stemmed pipe was thrust dagger fashion through his waist sash. Panting, he rushed up to the men, squatted among them, and after carefully looking around, addressed them in a low voice.

"There were some big battles to the north," he confided. "Wiped out plenty of Yellow Dogs! The ones in our town are scared to death. They held a meeting all night with the eleven puppet chiefs of the villages and wards. We'll have to be more careful."

Li smacked his thigh. "No wonder they've been acting so strange the past few days! We better warn all our people. The Yellow Dogs are liable to try to pillage us once more before they die!"

"That's nothing to worry about," said Bu. "They've taken all of our good clothes; there's nothing left for them to rob. Still, we'd better hide."

As they were speculating on this latest turn of events, a policeman, Sandz, approached beating a battered old gong. "One from each family," he called. "Meeting in the temple. Any family not represented will be fined the cost of fifty rounds of rifle bullets. . . ."

Old Man Shen stuck his pipe back into his sash. "Hmph! Living Hell!" he snorted, and took himself off.

There was not enough room in the temple for all the assembled peasants; many were crowded in the snow-filled courtyard. Widow Hsueh shivered with cold as she sat hugging her knees. In a muffled undertone, she spoke against the armpit of Old Man Shen beside her.

"He made contact! He says he's not going."

The old man poked her with his elbow. "The snow sure is cold," he said loudly.

She turned to see Ward Boss Chang lumbering angrily into the temple, like a bear with a sore tooth. He entered the temple and with a quick motion of his hand twisted open his jacket, revealing its heavy white fleece lining. He shoved a black gleaming automatic into his belt; then he fished a document from an inner pocket and read it aloud.

Nationalist Army order: In order to prepare for battle, all obstructions around the town of Newstream shall be removed. By three o'clock this afternoon all houses outside the town wall in the vicinity of the south and east gates must be leveled. No one is permitted to remove any of the tiles or beams. They are reserved for the use of the Nationalist Army. Whoever disobeys this proclamation will be shot at once as a bandit. Signed: District Commissioner Sun.

Chang swept the faces of his audience with a blood chilling glare. "If they're not leveled by three o'clock, they'll be burned to the ground!" he threatened. He pulled out his automatic and strode fiercely from the room.

The peasants stood as motionless as sticks of wood. They were dumbfounded. Tears rolled from the eyes of some. There was silence for the time it takes to eat half a bowl of gruel, then suddenly a great shout welled forth.

"Fight!" And the peasants surged out through the great door of the temple.

Widow Hsueh, wailing aloud to her departed father and mother, ran all the way home. She rushed into the house, threw her arms around "Chi" and fell weeping beside him on the bed.

"Dear," she cried. "Calamity has struck. . . ."

Feng-tse was slowly bandaging his wounds, after having cleaned and dressed them, when the widow burst in so abruptly. Startled, her skin crawling, she questioned her mother.

"Ma! Did someone tell about 'Chi' ?"

"Chi's" eyes rolled. "Ma! Speak up! . . ."

The widow half sat up. With her left hand on Feng-tse's shoulder and her right hand on "Chi's" chest, she said, "Sun has ordered that all houses outside the wall be torn down. If not, after lunch time, they'll all be burned! . . ." Again she cast herself down and beat her hands against the bedstead.

"Chi" frowned, and stared thoughtfully at the center roof beam for a long time. Finally, he held Widow Hsueh's head against his chest.

"Crying won't save the houses, Ma," he said. "We have to think of a plan. . . ."

He called Feng-tse over and the three whispered together at some length. Then Feng-tse stood up. She re-arranged the rosette in her hair.

"I'll go get Bu," she announced. "Ma, you wait for Old Man Shen near the wall. Each of us must spread the word. . . ." Feng-tse hurried away.

"Sister," "Chi" called after her, "tell Li that the youngsters must watch out."

"Let me do that," said Widow Hsueh. She took her small staff, tucked the ends of her head-kerchief firmly behind her knot of hair and clattered off like a horse at full gallop.

At about ten o'clock the same morning, outside the town walls there arose the sound of great lamenting. Men, women, old, young — walking, pickaback, being carried in arms, supported, with Buddhist yellow boards on their heads, clasping burning incense sticks, crying, shouting — massed outside the south gate of the town wall. The sentries were panic-stricken. They pulled up the drawbridge and closed the gate. In the blockhouse on top of the wall, they set up a machine gun and fired a warning burst in the air.

"If you come any closer, we'll kill you!" yelled the sentries.

But the peasants didn't lower their heads. They continued to move forward, shouting, "The Nationalist Army says it is for the peasants. Is it for the peasants that you're going to tear down our houses? Even the Japs, in the three years they were here, didn't do that. Go on, shoot us! We want to leave this living hell!"

There were over one hundred peasants — all ages and sizes, milling closely together. Some of the better-hearted soldiers on the wall were moved by their tears. They added their voices to the cries of the peasants.

"Why don't you shoot?" they shouted at their fellow soldiers. "Let's see if you can kill them all! . . ."

At noon, Ward Boss Chang, crawled up on the wall. "You're all rebels," he berated the peasants. "You'd better feel your necks. Do you want to have your heads cut off? A Nationalist Army order has been issued! . . ."

"That sister raper!" yelled one of the soldiers. "This is all the work of that fat Sun! Are we afraid of his police force's few lousy guns?"

In the blockhouse, a soldier threw down the machine gun. "Those mother rapers! I quit! We kill people to make it safe for Sun's crowd to go wenching and whoring! . . ."

"The ward boss is a sore loser!" another soldier yelled. "Let him step outside the wall and talk!"

Chang didn't like the way the wind was blowing. He yanked his hat down on his head and scurried away.

XIII

The row about leveling the houses raged for three days. Ward Boss Chang didn't know what to do. At last he reported to Sun in the latter's opium smoking parlor.

"Your excellency," said Chang mournfully, "unless you give me a couple of platoons of soldiers to enforce the order, I don't see how I can . . . . "

Sun had a belly full of suppressed rage for three days because of this affair, and had been lying in his parlor furiously smoking opium. Chang's words of helplessness were the last straw. Sun slammed his long opium pipe down on the bed and glared at his flunkey.

"You rice-stuffing son of a bitch! Is your gun made of wood?"

Chang's legs trembled. "Ex — excellency," he stammered. "There are old people and young children, crying and shouting and rolling on the ground. They've already softened some of our men. You want me to . . . . "

"Ai . . . " sighed Sun, raising his eyes to the ceiling with an expression of martyrdom. For a while he lay silent on the opium bed. Then he drew one of his calling cards from an inner pocket and handed it to Chang.

"Take this down to headquarters and invite Captain Wang to come here."

His forehead beaded with perspiration, Chang took the card and exited. When he got outside of the opium parlor, he cocked his hat rakishly over his left eye. Straightening up, he strode away, swinging his arms briskly.

Sun and Tsui, his daughter, busied themselves in the parlor. They covered the table with platters of candied dates, green apples, pears and tangerines. Before they had quite finished their preparations, Chang returned with the captain. Sun was so flurried he couldn't have found his backside with both hands. His head bobbed like he was pounding garlic with a pestle as he bowed deeply in servile greeting.

"I didn't know you would arrive so quickly or I would have gone out to welcome you," he apologized. "I beg your pardon. Tsui! Pour some tea, at once."

Chang stood behind the door, not daring to breathe.

Tsui was exceptionally talented at entertaining guests. She turned the lamp on the opium bed up brighter and drew a rose colored silk gauze handkerchief from her bosom. Smoothing the green satin bedspread, she smiled and looked sideways at the captain.

"Sit here, Captain, and have a smoke," she crooned. "Later we'll have some tea."

That dog of a captain was completely enchanted. "Yes, yes, yes," he said, not able to tear his eyes from her. He sat down on the place she indicated.

Sun pointed at Chang with pursed lips and nodded his head to signal the flunkey to go. Then he said, "Tsui, light a couple of pipes for the captain. I'm going to the rear quarters to prepare a half catty for him to take home with him." He left the room with Chang trailing behind him.

As soon as her rascal daddy was out of sight, Tsui, twisting her waist like a wasp and swaying her head, slithered into a recumbent position opposite the captain. Their heads were separated only by the small opium table.

"I hope you'll excuse our poor service, Captain," she said, her voice throbbing and seductive. The little black opium pellet which she held over the flame of the spirit lamp burned with a sizzling sound.

The dog of a captain put his hand on her breast. His drooling mouth hung open the size of a small bowl as he waited for the opium pipe. He paid no attention to Sun who came back treading softly and bearing half a catty of opium wrapped in oiled paper. Sun stood beside the bed and bowed low.

"Captain, it's not much," he murmured. "Only a small token. . . . "

Behind him, Chang, standing near the table, his head lowered, stole a glance at the captain. The officer still had his eyes riveted on Tsui. Only when Sun tapped his hand lightly with the oiled paper packet did he turn his head to look at him.

Sun observed that the opium pellets were all gone and that Tsui had none in preparation over the flame. He knew the right time had come.

"Captain, I have a difficult problem," he began. "I wonder if I could trouble you. . . . "

The captain removed the pipe from his mouth. The opium had had its effect and his eyes were full of star dust. "Certainly, certainly. Tell me everything. I'll take care of it. . . . "

Sun glanced at Chang, then said with a smile. "Captain, after your regiment left the other day, the local Communist bandits came and captured two of our sentries during the night. For safety's sake, I decided to tear down the houses outside the town wall, so that the bandits would have no cover for an attack. I also want

to build a small fortification at Yang Dun. But the peasants have drunk deep of the Communist poison, and they are resisting. . . ."

The soulless captain didn't wait for him to finish. Pounding the bed so hard that the opium lamp jumped, he shouted, "That's got to stop! Arrest their bandit leader and shoot him on the spot!"

"Captain," interposed Chang, bending humbly forward from the waist, "they've already had six or seven years of Communist bandit education. When they have anything to say, they all say it together. There's no way to handle them."

The dog of a captain's monkey eyes nearly popped. He jumped on the bed and pointed his finger at Chang, screaming, "The hell you say! Generalissimo Chiang has ordered: 'Rather kill one thousand innocents than let one of the guilty escape.' Tomorrow round them all up and turn the machine gun on them!"

Sun bowed. "Captain, may I make a humble suggestion? . . ."

The three men put their heads together and whispered for several minutes. Then the dog of a captain clapped Sun on the back.

"Very clever! My company'll wait for the proper time and then we'll drive those snakes out of the grass!"

Tsui, who had finished setting the table in the next room, came in and invited them to start drinking.

The next day at sunrise, Sandz, beating his gong, walked through the hamlet, crying, "His excellency has won the approval of the military authorities. The houses will not be razed! . . ." Young and old came pouring out of their homes to take him by the arm and to question him for all of the details. In an instant, the whole hamlet was in an uproar.

"The disaster is over!" cried the peasants.

By the time five days had expired everyone had more or less forgotten about the trouble. Then, one morning after breakfast, suddenly over two hundred Yellow Dogs emerged from the town. They surrounded all of the twenty odd family compounds and set up three machine guns on Yang Dun, a rise to the southwest.

Frightened and pale, Widow Hsueh ran home. "Look after 'Chi'," she said to Feng-tse. "They've come out from the town to search. . . ."

Sun, a leopard skin hat on his head and wearing a black overcoat over a long gown lined with fox fur, swung a dragon-head cane as he strutted and chatted with the dog captain, Wang.

They were preceded by Chang, the ward boss, who carried a pistol in his hand. Chang stopped before the door of the house of the peasant Shu.

"We'll start the operating knife here," he said.

Wang and Sun, the two performing bears, nodded and drew nearer. In an instant, from all sides came Yellow Dogs carrying iron hooks, pitchforks, rakes and spades. They drove before them peasants, men and women, to the haystacks in the courtyard of Shu's compound. Sun pounded the ground with his dragon-head cane, and his white eyeballs rolled back and forth behind his black shell-rimmed glasses. Raising his head, he laughed coldly.

"The Monkey was gay for a while when he raised a rumpus in Heaven, but he finally got his deserts. . . . You're a brazen lot, turned radical by the Communist bandits. You've refused to comply with the order of the Nationalist Army to raze the houses out here. Who is your leader? Let him step forward." Sun turned impatiently to Ward Boss Chang. "What are you waiting for, you son of a bitch? Get started!"

Holding his pistol, Chang crashed into Shu's house with a dozen Yellow Dogs behind him. "Come out," he could be heard shouting. "We're going to dynamite."

The peasants gathered before the haystacks had no time to think or act. They were completely taken by surprise. Shu fell on his knees before Chang and embraced his legs.

"You — you and I are relatives. Why do you want . . . ."

Chang's pistol barked three times. Shu's legs bounced up and blood spurted from his chest like tea from a kettle. His eyes rolled up and bulged from their sockets; not a sound came from his open mouth. Legs and feet straight, he fell dead.

With a cry, "My dear heaven! . . ." Shu's wife, carrying a six month old baby, rushed forward and threw herself on her husband's bloody body. Her seven-year-old little girl, holding her head, screamed, "Ma! . . ." and crept to her father's bosom. The horrified peasants burst into tears.

Sun pointed at them with his dragon-head cane. "Who else wants to step forward?"

His face red with anger, Bu started to say, "Use your machine guns — " when Old Man Li put his hand over his mouth.

"This is their day," the old man whispered as he dragged him away. "Don't run blindly against their gun muzzles. . . ."

Young Mrs. Shen grabbed her husband Tuan as he strained forward. "Don't move," she hissed. "There's nothing you can do."

"I'll step out myself," Old Man Shen warned his son. Mrs. Chou and Widow Hsueh also pulled him back. "Your life is important. Let them tear the houses down!"

Holding on tightly to their seething young men, the peasants broke up the gathering.

Feng-tse was helping "Chi" tie his head-kerchief when Widow Hsueh burst into the room. "We're finished . . . " she cried. "They just killed Shu!" She sat down abruptly, embracing "Chi" and wiping her tears.

Startled, Feng-tse turned to see two Yellow Dogs entering. Gleaming bayonets were affixed to their rifles. "Outside, outside!" they ordered. "We're going to blow down the house!" They seized the widow by the legs, dragged her through the door and tossed her outside.

"Get rolling! . . . "

Feng-tse's flesh leaped. She placed "Chi" on her back and half-crept and half-crawled to the haystack in front of the house. After covering his head with the bedding, she hurried back to pull her mother to safety.

Led by the dog captain, his pistol in hand, more than two hundred soldiers — ripping, tearing, dynamiting — leveled flat the houses of over twenty families in the time it takes to eat a meal. Old Man Shen hastened to the haystack where "Chi" and Feng-tse sat crying. He addressed himself to the widow.

"Dry your eyes," he snapped. "The bad times in this living hell, the snowy frosty days are yet to come. But we'll live through them! The sun will shine again!"

XIV

The calamity which leveled the houses of the peasants living outside the town walls created one hundred and thirty-six refugees, the youngest of whom was two months old and the eldest seventy-six years. These people without a roof over their heads gathered in a corner of Yang Dun hamlet and set up mat sheds. This settlement was thereafter treated as a special administrative unit of the ward. At the end of each day the peasants were counted; whoever wanted to go more than five *li* beyond the settlement had to ask permission from the ward office; if any family had a visitor

and did not report, they would be locked up for three months. The living hell was transformed into a deadly purgatory.

Ward Boss Chang had been so efficient in razing the peasants' homes that he was also made head of the village "Self Defense Corps". At Yang Dun he built an earthern wall and seven block-houses, which, because of their arrangement, became known as the "Big Dipper". He manned them with twenty-one puppets from the "Self Defense Corps". He mustered all the matshed peasants from fifteen to sixty — men and women alike — into a night watch section.

Children from seven to fifteen and old folks from sixty to seventy were made responsible for the little stone bridge half a *li* beyond the wall. An inspection shed was set up at the bridge and every day at sunrise the children and the ancients were herded to their job. They had to remain at their posts until relieved by the night watch. If a hawk cried while wheeling over the fields they had to report it to the town, and if a stranger approached they were supposed to beat a gong.

One day when Old Man Li and a boy were on duty, a young woman of twenty-two or three came to the bridge. Old Man Li was ashamed to search her, and the boy merely gave her a few light timid pats and told her to go on. They nearly died when she pulled a black gleaming little pistol from the waistband of her trousers and yelled, "Don't move!" It turned out that she was a wench who had been sent from the town to test their vigilance. She turned them over to the authorities who gave them seven days in jail for "failing to search thoroughly".

From that time on, whenever any of the old men were assigned to sentry duty at the bridge they got some of the younger men, like Li or Bu, to take their place. The peasants joked about it and named Li the Matshed Captain. With the building of the earthen wall at Yang Dun, the lot of the matshed peasants worsened daily. Their tax for the support of the civil and military authorities was increased by fifty per cent. The money was used to supply those worthies with fuel, lamp oil, food, bath-house expenses, haircuts, rifle bullets, uniforms, and so on. In less than three months, the twenty-seven families in the matshed settlement became completely impoverished. No smoke arose from their cook stoves. The peasants have a saying, "Plenty in January, poor in February," and it was in the "poor" month that the matshed settlement began. Yet by helping one another,

they were able to get along. If one family had something to cook, the other families all came with their bowls. But by the end of March, the twenty-seven families together couldn't scrape up one bowl of grain. There was nothing for them to do but take up their staves and go begging in the town and in its outskirts.

One day Widow Hsueh came home with a tile jug full of millet gruel. Her hair was tousled and she was barefooted; her face was splotched with dirt, her arms were as thin as reeds; even walking made her groan with the effort. As she entered the matshed, "Chi" sat up on his pallet on the ground.

"My wounds are better, Ma. I'll go begging with you tomorrow."

"There was still pus in them the day before yesterday. You can't — " the widow was answering with a smile when Feng-tse came in carrying a small bucket.

"What are you doing, sitting up?" Feng-tse scolded. She knelt beside "Chi" and embraced him. "Lie down at once!" She took the bowl which her mother gave her and began to feed him.

Widow Hsueh stepped outside of the matshed and nearly ran into Sandz. He had a carbine slung across his back and was going from hovel to hovel "conscripting" men for the army. This was a favorite Kuomintang device for squeezing money out of the peasants. Actually it was a head tax, allegedly paid in lieu of conscription, on each young man in the family.

"Your family, having no able-bodied man, pays two pecks and eight pints of grain. You've got three days . . ." he told her. She hung her head as he strode to the next matshed. Without pausing he announced to Old Man Shen, "Your family, having an able-bodied man, pays five pecks and six pints of grain. . . ."

That day there was weeping and wailing in the matshed settlement until past midnight. After Bu and Old Man Shen persuaded the widow to go to sleep they went to help Mrs. Li who was treating her illness with needle punctures. "Chi" lay on his pallet with his eyes shut. He seemed to see a girl about the same size as himself. She was covered with blood and lying in a pit. Suddenly she jumped out, screaming, "Escape from the living hell! . . ." Shaking, he awakened and crawled to a sitting position.

Just then, treading lightly, Feng-tse came in from outside. "Look," she said. "Li asked me to bring this to you. He's standing guard. . . ." She excitedly handed him a slip of paper that was concealed in her hair.

"Chi" unfolded the slip, struck a match and read in the brief feeble light: "The county committee directs that you form a local Party branch to lead the opposition to the conscription levy."

He put the paper in his mouth and said to Feng-tse, "Go to sleep, sister." A while later he was still sitting up listening to the even breathing of Feng-tse and the widow.

"I am Chi and Chi is me . . ." Feng-tse mumbled in her sleep.

"Chi" heaved a sigh. "The poor girl is still thinking of her murdered sister," he said to himself. He crawled to the entrance of the matshed and quietly sat down on a little stool. In the dim moonlight he gazed dully at the big grave mound in which the real Chi was buried.

Turning in her sleep, Feng-tse's hand fell on "Chi's" unoccupied pallet. The emptiness startled her to wakefulness and she rolled to her feet crying, "Ma, 'Chi' — Where — "

The widow awoke at once. "Dear," she called. "My dear — "

"I'm over here," replied "Chi".

The widow hurried to his side and embraced him. "Dear, what are you doing? . . ."

"Didn't you hear what Bu said?" Feng-tse demanded worriedly. "When you're wounded, you shouldn't go running around."

"I feel rotten," he said leaning his head against Widow Hsueh's bosom. He took Feng-tse's hand in his. "Sister, do you know how Sun was able to tear down our houses?"

Feng-tse looked at him blankly, then mumbled, "He came with a lot of soldiers. How could we stop him?"

"Do you think we can get away without paying the conscription levy this time?"

"Not one family has anything to eat. How can we pay? Better let them kill us all."

"Chi" shook his head. "No. I went wrong in the movement against the razing of the houses — I didn't organize the leadership well; we had no real working organization. We were taken in by Sun's delaying trick. . . ."

"Weren't you the one who told the young people to stay out of sight?" Feng-tse demanded listlessly. "We're all simple clods. How can we outwit him? We'd better deal with him slowly."

"This time we'll learn from our experience with the house razing. The Party has already approved seven of you to form a

branch. You shall lead the fight against the conscription levy. Use soft evasion and hard opposition, and struggle to the end! Tell Li when he goes begging outside the walls tomorrow to talk it over with everyone."

Groping her way through the dark, Widow Hsueh re-entered the matshed and said to "Chi", "It's turning light in the east. The Dogs will be coming out of the town soon. You had better lie down." And to Feng-tse she said, "Carry him inside." She again stepped to the door and looked around. She was relieved to see that all was quiet.

For three days following the imposition of the conscription levy, both inside and outside the town walls there was much uneasiness and unrest. On the fourth day Chang sent Sandz to hasten the payments.

Sandz first went to see Old Man Li, and said to him roughly, "I want your family's payment. Be quick about it!"

Old Man Li carried a bench as he emerged from his shed. He bowed and said with a smile, "Please, sit down."

"Pei!" spat Sandz. "I don't want to sit. What about your conscription levy?" He scowled angrily.

"If the Nationalist Army wants us to die, better let us die slowly. You've torn down our houses and taken away our land. How do you expect to get any money out of people you've squeezed dry? If you want men instead of money, we'll go." As Old Man Li spoke, over twenty women came out of the matsheds and gathered around him. They joined their voices in protest.

Sandz jumped to his feet and glared at Li with his panther eyes. "You're a bold one! If you want to complain about the levy, come to the village with me. And what are these women making such a fuss about!"

"All right, let's go! Die now or later, it's all the same! You're going to kill us eventually anyhow."

"Come on! Come with me!"

Then Old Man Shen appeared on the scene. "Sandz," he said coldly, "you too have held the beggar's staff. You know the bitterness of being poor. How can beggars raise money to pay the levy? Tell us, in good conscience."

For a moment Sandz had no answer and he blushed deeply. "I didn't say you could raise it," he mumbled. "I'm only doing this job because I have to eat. It's no use quarreling with me."

"Ai! I'm not quarreling with you! I'm asking you to go back and put in a good word for us. Ask them not to press us this time."

"All right, I don't want the levy. You go and talk to the ward boss yourselves." Sandz slung his carbine across his back and shame-facedly plodded away.

When the sun was in the west, six soldiers of the puppet Self Defense Corps came out Yang Dun and took off Bu, Old Man Shen and Old Man Li. The peasants became very frightened. "Chi", Feng-tse and Li held a meeting, after which Li and Feng-tse went into conference with several other groups of peasants. By sunset all the peasants of matshed settlement went into action. With Mrs. Hsiao, Mrs. Shu and Feng-tse leading the women and Li, Tuan, Kwang and Shun leading the men, the peasants, carrying their simple furniture and cooking cauldrons, advanced to the ward hamlet to "pay the conscription levy" with these last meager possessions.

"Throw us in jail if you want; we'll starve to death at home anyhow! We're giving these things instead of money!" they shouted as they entered Yang Dun.

Ward Boss Chang crawled out of a blockhouse and hurried toward them. "Who dares to oppose the National levy? I arrest you all. . . ."

Mrs. Hsiao and Mrs. Shu flung themselves at his feet and embraced his legs. "Kill us with your pistol! Living only means suffering!"

Twenty more old women surrounded him and pressed close. Chang was so startled that he fell back several paces.

Kwang stepped forward. "Now that you're ward boss, you have no use for the peasants! We'll appeal to the county magistrate. If he says nobody wants the peasants, we'll all hold hands and jump off the dam into the river."

Several dozen more peasants crowded round Chang. He didn't like the look of things. He wanted to leave but couldn't get out of the mass of humanity squeezing him from all sides. His hand holding the pistol was pressed straight up into the air and he didn't dare to shoot. His face turned dark red with anxiety. "All right, all right," he said. "This levy was imposed by His Excellency Sun. You come to town with me to see him. . . ."

"We're not afraid to go before the Devil himself!" shouted Li, brandishing his fist against the sky. "Dying is better than leading this kind of life!"

Over one hundred peasants took up the cry. "Let's go! We'll give these things to pay the levy! . . . Talk sense! If Chiang Kai-shek kills all the peasants, who'll raise the crops? Can he live on air?" Carrying their household goods, they surged toward the town.

Chang sneaked away from them and ran into the town. Instead of bringing them to Sun he sent more Self Defense Corps soldiers to drive the peasants back. But the peasants refused to leave. They shouted and cried and yelled until dark, then went to sleep on the tables and benches which they had been carrying. At dawn they took up their bowls and went to every barrack in town, begging and telling their grievances. By the end of three days, they had aroused the sympathy of many people in the town and some of the soldiers. These people and soldiers joined them in their protest demonstration. Their forces swelled from one hundred to over three hundred, and made themselves heard outside the main gate of Sun's house. On the fourth day, Sun could see that things were going badly. He came out personally to address the demonstrators.

"The time for the matshed settlement to pay the levy has been extended . . . " he said with a false smile.

Before he could go any further, the voice of Feng-tse rose in reply, "We won't be fooled again. In three days from now, you'll come collecting again. Kill us with one thrust of the knife; don't torture us slowly! Turn your machine guns on us!"

"All right, all right! You all go back! You don't have to pay anything!"

"That's a lie! If we don't have to pay, why don't you release our three men?" cried Tuan.

"Go back. They'll be released at once!" Sun was trying hard to appear benevolent.

"We'll live together or we'll die together," shouted Kwang. "We won't leave until they join us!"

Sun opened his mouth to speak but he was drowned out by hundreds of angry voices. He could only scratch his head and rub his behind. Finally, like a dog with his tail between his legs, he turned and ran, saying, "I'll release them, I'll release them. . . ."

The guards at the gate of Sun's compound became terrified. Leveling their rifles, they backed in and closed and bolted the gate, which they strengthened with two additional crossbars. Furiously the peasants threw rocks against the gate and pounded the wall. They moved forward in ever increasing numbers and their roars demanding the release of the three peasants shook the thatch loose from the roofs of nearby houses.

From a fort behind the house came twenty police with fixed bayonets. "Leave!" they threatened the peasants. "Or we'll kill everyone of you!"

"Go on, stab me!" cried Feng-tse.

"Stab us! Kill us!" shouted the peasants, milling around the police.

"Don't get excited," said the police, making soothing notions with their hands. "Talk one at a time." As the crowd pressed in on them, their guns were forced to point upwards.

At dusk Sun was literally jumping with nervousness. He sent for another thirty soldiers of the Self Defense Corps from the east gate of the town. They fired a few shots from a distance, but before the smoke had drifted away from the muzzles of their guns, the soldiers were engulfed by the crowd.

"Living Hell murders the people!" the peasants cried.

One of the policemen threw his rifle to the ground. "Whoever takes any more of fat Sun's dirty money to kill people would rape his own mother! Let Sun do his murdering himself!" He elbowed and pushed his way through the throng and strode away.

Some of the soldiers who overheard him put up their guns. Others flung their weapons down and followed him. From the top of his manor house, Sun could see his soldiers and policemen, one by one, walking off. Convinced at last that the peasants would not leave until Old Man Shen, Bu and Old Man Li were released, Sun was forced to let his hostages go.

XV

As a result of having slept out in the open for three nights, Widow Hsueh became seriously ill with a high fever. She talked deliriously all the time and her tongue was so hot that it became hard. Old Man Shen was worried to the point of weeping.

"Ai!" he groaned. "We no sooner get through the man-made disaster than another one is thrown on our heads from the gods. . . ."

Along with Mrs. Hsiao, Li, Bu and a few others he sat at the widow's bedside all night until she broke into a perspiration and her fever went down. Only then were the peasants able to breathe freely again.

Feng-tse, only eighteen, had been subjected very little to the slings and arrows of cruel fortune. The sight of her mother lying at death's door, plus the fact that "Chi's" wounds began to fester again, made her cry distractedly. The peasants organized a movement for each family to bring one bowl of gruel from their day's begging.

Even Mrs. Shu, whose five-year-old daughter was down with malaria, helped out. The child's grandmother had sent a silver dollar to buy medicines, but the mother had another idea.

"The baby is a little better the past few days," Mrs. Shu said to herself, looking at the coin in her hand. "If I can help to cure 'Chi's' wound quicker, that would be good. . . ." She went to the market and bought five catties of fine wheat noodles and delivered them to Feng-tse.

With the arrival of late spring every family had some wheat to harvest. Widow Hsueh by then was able to leave her bed. "Chi" could move freely with the aid of a staff, but he never went very far for fear of running into strangers.

One day Feng-tse was plodding slowly home with a basket of wheat on her back and a bundle of wheat stalks in her arms. The load bent her nearly double. Beads of perspiration as big as soy beans rolled down her face. "Chi" and Widow Hsueh were seated in front of the door of the matshed, vigorously rotating sheaves of wheat between their hands to shake off the grains. "Chi" looked up to see Feng-tse, laden like a camel, approaching in the distance.

"Ma, Feng-tse is coming back," he said. Taking his staff, he hobbled out to meet her.

Feng-tse was furious that her mother should be working on the wheat. By the time she reached the matshed she was fuming. She flung her basket to the ground and said, "You've just gotten better and you haven't had a good meal yet! If you get sick again, everyone will have to get busy again to look after you! What's the idea?"

Widow Hsueh wiped the dust from her eyes with the hem of her blue cotton jacket. "Dear, when a poor person gets sick she

can't afford to be so fussy. Mama can't stay in bed. There's only one spring harvest per year."

"Feng-tse," said "Chi", "I gleaned a basketful of wheat roots with Mama today. . . ."

"Is that so!" snapped Feng-tse. "You're another fine one! You won't be satisfied unless you get sick again and make everyone wait on you!"

"Chi's" face froze at this unexpected attack. Widow Hsueh fairly sparked with anger. "You're behaving like a mad dog — biting everyone in your path! What has 'Chi' done to you that you treat him like this?"

Feng-tse blushed. Hanging her head, she embraced "Chi". "We've all been so worried about you, 'Chi'," she murmured. "Even if I suffer to death, I'll be able to close my eyes if only your wounds heal. . . ."

"Chi" squeezed her hand tight. "I know what a good heart you have and I'll never be able to repay your kindness. . . ." He and the girl shed tears, and the widow wept, too.

Leaning on "Chi's" shoulder, Feng-tse cried. The tears ran from her eyes and dripped off the tip of her nose. She drew from her bosom a slip of paper which she handed to "Chi".

"Shun sent this. . . ."

Wiping his eyes, "Chi" read the message. His face flushed and he laughed aloud for joy. "Good news, Ma," he said softly, stamping the ground approvingly. "Yesterday the Newstream police went to Chiao Village to seize grain. The people's militia killed over a dozen of them. The people's militia won a victory!"

"Really?" chortled Feng-tse. Smiling happily, she and her mother looked at the good tidings.

"No wonder!" said Widow Hsueh reflectively. "When I was sitting here this morning, sixteen trucks went by laden with empty sacks. Three more trucks just passed here a little while ago. They were full of those wild soldiers."

Feng-tse rested her head against "Chi's" chest. "Li said for us to be careful," she said softly. "They'll probably be coming here for grain in a day or two. He'll be back as soon as he gets a clear picture of the situation!"

Suddenly she heard a sound and turned her head to see a twenty-year-old Kuomintang soldier quietly approaching from behind the matshed. His face was covered with deep pockmarks. Furrows of

worry creased his brow and his eyebrows were tightly knit. Without a word he stood peering into the matshed and dully blinking his eyes.

"A soldier!" whispered Feng-tse nudging "Chi". She pretended to continue chaffing the wheat.

"Chi" turned around and looked at the soldier wearing the big hat. He winked at the widow and said out of the corner of his mouth, "Ma, you're sleepy. Go inside and take a nap."

The widow was frightened. "You two had better go into the fields. There's still wheat to be gathered. . . ."

"Chi" crawled to his feet and hobbled after Feng-tse, as the widow had hinted.

The big-hatted soldier stood stolidly in the doorway. "Ai!" he sighed. "When I put on this uniform I became a devil. When the peasants see me, they wink and talk out of the sides of their mouths and rush away. I'm paying for my sins in my last incarnation. . . ."

Gazing at him, Widow Hsueh's eyes became red and she wailed, "Oh my precious son, where are you now? You've left your mother here to suffer; your sister's leg has been broken and you don't care! My heart, my precious. . . ." She fell to the ground and wept bitterly.

The soldier watched her with anguish for a long time. Frowning he went up to her and said softly, "Old mother, are you afraid of me? Old mother, I too became a soldier because there was no other way out!" His eyes clouded and he burst into tears.

At this, the widow wept still more loudly. "Looking at your uniform reminds me of my son!" she sobbed, and rolled upon the ground.

The soldier hugged her tight. "Tell me what's troubling you. You shouldn't cry so, it's bad for you at your age. . . ." he urged miserably. He helped her to sit up.

Widow Hsueh wiped her eyes. "My son is about as tall as you. This year he's twenty-one. He'd only been married three days when, on the ninth of February, the Nationalists dragged him away to be a soldier. I haven't heard a word from him since. His wife was taken away by soldiers from the city! I saw his seventeen-year-old sister fall with seven bullet holes in her leg. I get sick thinking of it. If I die, there's no man in the family to carry the mourning staff or pile the grave mound or burn paper money. When he was seven, I became a widow and brought him up! . . ." Again the widow rolled on the ground in a paroxysm of grief.

Crying freely, the soldier squatted beside her and raised his head to the sky. "Ah! The world is full of people like us. . . ." He started to say more, but cut himself short and walked rapidly away.

It was an exhausting day, and that night the widow's face burned like fire and all her bones ached. For a long time she tossed sleepless on her bed. Then she rose quietly and walked to the door. A light wind had just begun to blow a fine rain before it. Hastily she returned to awaken Feng-tse.

"Get up," she cried. "Come with Mama to bring in the rest of the wheat. It's raining! The lives of the three of us depend on our getting that wheat in!"

As the widow came running in, panting, with her first sheaf of wheat, she thought she heard the sloshing sound of someone running after her through the rain. She turned to see a huge shadow stretching from the floor to the ceiling. Her heart leaped within her and she collapsed to the ground calling faintly, "Feng-tse. . . ."

The shadow slowly diminished to normal size. "Old mother," it said softly. "You mustn't make a row. I'm a fugitive."

"Who — who are you, coming here in the middle of the night? We have no man in the house. . . ."

"Mother, I'm the one who came today. I'm the Nationalist soldier. Mother, please don't raise a fuss!"

Feng-tse, who had been hiding behind the door, was terribly frightened. She hurried to "Chi's" bed and shook him awake. "Sister! Nationalists!"

"Be quiet!" "Chi" whispered in her ear. "Listen. Take my staff and stand close to the wall. If there's only one of them — then strike!"

When Widow Hsueh heard the soldier say he was the same one who had been there that afternoon, she became paralyzed with terror. Shaking from head to foot, she pleaded, "Be a good man, my daughter is so young . . . don't — don't ruin her. . . . My daughter . . . Feng-tse, quickly. . . ."

The black figure fell on its knees. "Mother, control yourself! I'm from Anhuei, my name is Wang. I was conscripted in January this year! I have a sixty-four-year-old blind mother at home and a seventeen-year-old sister. They'll starve to death. She'll miss me just as you miss your son. I beg you, save my life! Don't make any noise!"

"You — you mustn't harm me! I'm a wronged suffering widow. The town is full of soldiers who may find you here. That will be bad for all of us. You'd better go back, quickly!"

"Mother, I'd die before I'd have anything more to do with them — using American guns to kill our own fathers and mothers! I've run away. If I go back, I'm finished! Please, save me. . . ." The soldier put his head on her lap and wept.

"Chi" got up from the bed and took Feng-tse's arm. "A deserter. Quick, see if he has a gun."

The soldier's statement that he had run away reassured Widow Hsueh somewhat. "You — what do you want to do? . . ." she stammered.

"My father was murdered by the Kuomintang; my brother was taken away by them and we haven't seen a shadow of him in seven years. I'm the only man left in the family. Old mother, I want to go home. . . ."

In the dark, "Chi" came toward them. He could see that the soldier had a gun on his person. He shook the widow's shoulder. "Ma, he's a conscript, he wants to go home, he's run away. Don't you understand yet?"

"It's not that, dear. I do understand. He wants me to save him. How can I save him? It's like trying to stand on the edge of the cauldron. It's too risky. . . ."

"Old mother, if you have an old pair of trousers and shirt I can change for this uniform, I'll be able to go!"

"We — we're all women here."

"Ma," interrupted Feng-tse, "saving a person's life is more virtuous than giving up meat for seven years! I'll go find Tuan."

She started to leave but the black figure pulled her back. "No, don't," he pleaded. "If a breath of this gets out I'm a dead man."

"Go quietly and borrow the clothes. Don't say what you want them for," directed "Chi". He addressed the soldier. "Let her go. Our lives are staked on yours."

The soldier released Feng-tse and patted the pistol concealed under his tunic against his chest. "I was prepared to kill myself if I couldn't find civilian clothes. Now what shall I do with this thing?"

"You shouldn't think that way," said Widow Hsueh, shaking her head. "Even worms and snakes want to live."

"You'd better give it to me," said "Chi", after a pause. "I'll hide it for you. Someone's bound to notice its bulge if you carry it on you."

The soldier handed the pistol to "Chi". "These all come from America," he said. "They're used to kill our Chinese people. It makes me see red just to look at it! If you can't hide it, burn it. No one must find that pistol."

A few minutes later, Feng-tse came rushing back with clothes which the soldier hastily donned. He grinned as he gave them a final adjustment. "Fine. Just right!"

"Go southeast from here across three empty threshing grounds," "Chi" told him as he inspected the soldier's disguise. "After you cross a small stream, you'll be in the liberated areas. I hear that they give traveling expenses home to men who leave the Kuomintang army. . . ."

"It's only five *li* from here," Widow Hsueh interposed. "They say that the day before yesterday the PLA sent three of your men home. When you get over tell them — "

With a quick motion of his hand, "Chi" stopped her. "The PLA has a liberal policy. They never kill people for no reason. Don't worry, just go!"

The dark figure knelt before Widow Hsueh. "Mother, if Heaven favors me and I reach home, I'll burn incense every day in thanks to you. . . ." He rose to leave.

Feng-tse took him by the hand. "It will be light soon. I'll send you on your way." She led him quietly through the wicker gate.

"Feng-tse dear, take the road south of the big cemetery. Be careful!" said Widow Hsueh, following after them for a few paces.

The two dark figures were almost instantly dissolved in the fine drizzle that fell softly on the sleeping countryside.

XVI

Newstream became more filled with soldiers every day, and the peasants of the matshed settlement grew poorer every day. Within one month after the wheat harvest, as a result of the Kuomintang levies and assessments, every household was stripped empty. The people could only gaze at the rafters and sigh, everyone wishing that he could fly far from this living hell.

"Chi" called a meeting, as a result of which the peasants found a means of getting in touch with the liberated areas and were

helped to organize a spinning group. With the money they earned by spinning, twenty-seven families were able to make a passable living for the next four months.

Early one morning, before cocks began to crow or dogs to stir, Feng-tse and "Chi" were seated outside their doorway. They were intent on their buzzing spindles and didn't notice young Tuan's quiet approach. He tapped Feng-tse on the shoulder and grasped "Chi's" hand.

They all went inside where Tuan spoke to them in a low voice. "Things are getting tight," he said. "The town has to produce thirteen conscripts and our ward is responsible for four of them. They're coming to grab them soon. They seem to be in a hurry this time."

"Won't they take money instead?" asked Feng-tse.

"No. The ward boss held a meeting in the village last night. They decided to take five piculs six pecks of wheat from each family in the town, but they want men from our settlement. I'm afraid they're going to be tough about it."

"This is just what the Party has been saying would happen," muttered "Chi". "The Kuomintang has been badly defeated in Shantung, the Northeast and the Northwest. Liu Po-cheng's Liberation Army has already reached Ta Pieh mountains. Chiang Kai-shek's forces are in a panic. They have to do this. . . . Tell everyone to be on guard. Have you spoken to them yet?"

"We let the young men know. Young Chu wants to sneak away and hide!" Tuan's eyes were big.

"There's no need to get excited," said "Chi" slowly and deliberately. "Forewarned is forearmed. Go find Li and tell him to call a meeting. Everyone must talk this over carefully. We want to be able to strike the first blow!"

"Right, right. That's what Yin was saying last night. The idea is to hit them first. — their mothers! We'll fix those poison snakes!"

Awakened by their discussion, Widow Hsueh padded over and took "Chi's" arms. "Dear, for heaven's sake don't do anything rash! You can't lightly go killing people. . . ."

"You mustn't let this thing get out of hand," worried Feng-tse. "We can't just pick up our homes and move!"

Tuan cocked his head to one side. "The devil you say. With two shoulders and a mouth, any place you go you can work and eat. I suppose you can't bear to leave this little matshed! If we're going to do this thing, let's do it right, I say!" He strode away.

"Chi" led Feng-tse outside the door. They looked up at the clouds racing like horses across the sky. A half-moon was now obscured, now shining clear, as the clouds trailed their veils before its face.

"You see, Feng-tse," said "Chi". "At noon today, the weather changed suddenly. The whole sky turned black and thunder roared and rumbled. Mama was afraid it would rain. Now the moon shines brighter and brighter through the dark night clouds and tomorrow the sun will come out! The skies over our living hell will also clear very soon!"

Suddenly, from the town a white flare zoomed up into the sky. All of the dogs in the neighborhood began a clamorous barking. Feng-tse, startled by the unexpected brilliance of the flare, dropped to the ground and embraced "Chi's" legs.

"Get down," she urged. "Don't let them see us. . . ."

"Chi" sat beside her on the grass, but waved his hand casually. "Try to be a little braver. The day before yesterday many of our forces started in this direction from Shantung. The mad dogs in the town are frightened. They're setting off flares to give themselves courage. They can't see anyone!"

"They nearly scared me to death!" said Feng-tse, fluttering her hand against her bosom.

"Chi" peered into her face. "The disaster of this living hell and the suffering of the people in it is coming to an end. The dead will rise and leap from the torture pit. Why do you want to throw cold water on us, to speak words of discouragement? Now is the crisis. A twenty ton sword hangs by a hair. If you don't kill them, they'll kill you. Have you forgotten your father and the one buried in the big grave mound?"

Feng-tse raised her head and stared at the moon, then looked toward the town and the big grave mound behind it. Her eyes grew hot and she crept against "Chi's" chest, unable to utter a word.

As Feng-tse sat weeping in "Chi's" arms, they heard rapidly approaching footsteps. It was Tuan hurrying toward them to announce breathlessly, "They're coming!"

"Let's get inside," said "Chi" waving his hand and jumping to his feet. "You stay out here," he directed Feng-tse. "If there's any movement, cough once. Watch carefully!" He went into the matshed with the peasants who had arrived.

As he crowded inside, "Chi" asked, "Is everyone here?"

"All except Mrs. Hsiao," replied Li from the rear of the crowd. "She's trying to find out what the Yellow Dogs are up to. Let's start the meeting!"

Seated in the midst of the peasants, "Chi" read to them the instructions of the county Party committee regarding the opposition to conscription. He explained that sooner or later the Yellow Dogs would come to grab conscripts. The peasants discussed the problem.

"This conscription means that the flames are licking our behinds," said Li. "We can't remain quiet any longer, we have to jump out and do something!"

"Every one of them we kill will be one less root on the tree of our disaster!" added Kuang. "Son of a bitch! Get rid of Chang and our living hell will have lost an arm. And I'd like to be the one to do it!"

Yin pushed his way forward from the rear. "It could be done very easily now," he said, slapping his thigh for emphasis. "Tonight when I went to call Hsi for guard duty, Fung told me he saw Chang leaving the village to go see that New Bride. He was reeling drunk."

"Chi" noticed Chu, sitting with his head down and clucking despondently. "What's your idea, old Chu?" "Chi" asked him.

Chu frowned. "Their backsides sit firmly on the horse. It can't fly away, it can't crawl away, it can't move its family away or its land," he replied cryptically. "If you rip the stitching open wide, it'll be hard to sew it up again. Let's talk about this again some other time. We hear a lot about the Communist counter-attacks but who knows when they'll be able to liberate us here? . . ."

Standing beside him was Shun, his face flushing an angry red and the cords in his neck bulging. "You sexless old monk!" he fumed. "Who among us isn't eating from a makeshift stove? We kick it over and go! What kind of big property ties you down? When they bind you with rope and throw you on the truck, you'll never get to any home again! We have to act. . . ."

Tuan jumped forward. "We only have to keep our nerve. Why should we be afraid of them if we've got guns? Sure we have families to think of, but so have they!"

"Docile men are cheated, docile horses are ridden," the widow of the murdered Shu said to Chu. "When they came to tear down our houses and Shu knelt before Chang and pleaded with him, Chang shot him dead on the spot. If we all stick together and fight them on this conscription, it won't matter what they try. You *will* die if you're afraid to die! You son of a bitch, do you want to live to be a thousand!"

"That's right!" Li chimed in. "They want our guts, so we must tear their hearts out! There are only six youths left in our twenty-seven families. If they take three of them, how will we be able to manage? Strike, I say!"

"Ai!" Chu exclaimed. "It's not that I'm afraid. If we strike, I'm willing to be among the first. I only say — how are we going to do it bare-handed?"

"Chi" stood up and looked from face to face. "If only you all agree, the guns are no problem. I have one here. . . ." He stepped outside and brought the pistol in from its hiding place. It was a shiny black American automatic. He pulled it open. "You see — with eighteen bullets. I've just cleaned it. I guarantee it will work fine. Li has one buried at his place that's also very good, and Tuan has a home-made pistol."

"We don't need a lot of guns to take care of Chang," said Li. "Just one knife will do the trick. Let's show some backbone!"

"If we're going to act, let's do it quickly. . . ." Tuan started to say, when from outside they heard Feng-tse's warning cough.

"Don't anybody move," hissed "Chi". "Get down. Someone is coming."

Li took the pistol from "Chi's" hand and flattened himself beside the door. The peasants held their breaths and nervously squatted on the floor of the matshed. Then Feng-tse came to the window.

"'Chi'," she called. "It's Mrs. Hsiao!"

In the room, everyone sighed as though a crushing stone had dropped from his chest. "Ai! That wench! She nearly scared me to death!"

Mrs. Hsiao rushed in carrying a roll of papers. "Good news, good news!" she panted. "It's all in these bulletins! We have to paste them up before morning! And I've brought a letter too!"

"Chi" took the letter from her. Raising his jacket he said to Li, "Please strike a match. Shield the light with your coat. . . ." In the flickering flame he glanced quickly at the message and jumped to his feet before finishing reading. "South of Salt City we've won another big victory! We put over seven thousand Yellow Dogs out of action. . . ."

The peasants practically leaped to the ceiling with joy. "Let's go! The blind man still whets the knife long after it's gleaming sharp! The time for us to strike is overdue!" Li started to leave with the automatic.

"Chi" stopped him. "Everybody keep calm. We'll talk things over, then strike. This is a matter of killing someone. It isn't like being in the fields where you pick up the plow and walk. Sit down again."

"Of course," said Chu coolly. "Who takes the gun, who enters the house, who stands outside — all these things must be planned in advance. This running around like a lot of hens won't kill anybody! It's damn nonsense!"

Startled, Li stood stock-still, but Tuan, beside him, was frothing with impatience. He glared at Chu. "Huh! Don't be so fussy. We're not doing embroidery! You're cautious because you're afraid. If every Party member were as soft and weak as you, we'd never get anywhere!"

Chu leaped up. "What son of a bitch says I'm afraid?"

"Now, now, now, don't quarrel," "Chi" soothed him, taking him by the arm. "Let's talk about our task, not each other. Come on, sit down, all of you." Their faces resuming their usual expressions, the peasants again took their seats.

"Let Kuang stand guard outside with this gun," said Li, patting it. "I'll go into the house with Tuan. Let's go!"

"What about the girl?" asked Yin.

"Hell," said Tuan, cocking his head to one side. "— 'When you catch a thief grab his loot, when you catch adulterers seize them both.' One knife for the two of them will do the job clean!"

"You mustn't," interposed Mrs. Shu. "The young bride is a good girl. She was a virgin for nineteen years without a smirch on her name. She only came to this place and married three

months ago and then Chang conscripted her husband. Now he's forced himself on her! You can't do it. It's a hard job for a poor man to take a bride."

With his head down, "Chi" thought for several minutes. "Mrs. Shu is right," he said finally. "A tiger can't get out of a deep trap. What do you expect the girl to do? I'm against killing her. What do the rest of you say?"

"All right, all right," Tuan conceded. "That's the way it'll be."

"Chi" picked up the sheaf of bulletins. "Then we all agree. Now we'll assign our jobs: Li, Kuang, Yin and Tuan will take care of Chang. Chu and Shun paste up the bulletins. Mrs. Hsiao, Mrs. Shu and Feng-tse separate and notify everyone to prepare for the storm tomorrow. After you men have done your work, fire one shot toward the southeast, and assemble at the big grave mound. People will be there from the outside to meet you. You don't have to worry about your families. Those of us staying behind will be responsible for them!"

"Let's all do our tasks bravely," said Li. He had already slipped out the door.

The peasants in the matshed crowded out after him. They all left quickly, each to his appointed task.

XVII

At dawn, on a willow tree near the southwest corner of Yang Dun, hung a gory, dripping head. To the left of it was pasted the victory bulletin; on its right a sheet of white paper was affixed, inscribed with characters as big as chicken eggs. The paper wasn't exactly an announcement, nor could you really say it was a poem:

Our living hell produced three bogies,
A wolf, a tiger and a poisonous snake.
They built walls and forts and leveled houses,
Turned our bright world into a gloomy dark hell.
Retaking land, forcing back rents, imposing heavy levies,
They conscripted and killed just like slicing vegetables.
We poor people organized a life protection army,
And shouldered our guns to wipe out the calamities.
First killing the most poisonous local snake,
We destroyed Chang, the ward boss.
In order to be forever out of the sea of bitterness,
We'll hack the wolf, smash the tiger and remake our world!

As the news of Chang's execution spread, peasants for miles around Newstream danced for joy. Men and women in steady streams came across the fields to the willow tree. They thronged around it in such vast crowds that to those in the rear the head appeared no bigger than a sesame seed. A man could be heard slowly reading aloud the victory pronouncement. His voice was already quite hoarse from many recitations.

An urgent telegram from the central front, dated the second: The Chinese People's Liberation Army south of Salt City has wiped out more than 7,000 men of the Fourth and Fifty-first Divisions of Bandit Chiang Kai-shek's 'Annihilation Corps' — captured General Chang Shao-liang and three thousand men of the Ninetieth Brigade, Fourth Division; killed or wounded the commanding general and four thousand men of the One Hundred Thirteenth Brigade, Fifty-first Division. . . .

Volley upon volley of applause thundering from the multitude and enthusiastic political slogans could be heard a *li* away. Sixty-seven-year-old Ping elbowed and pushed his way through the crowd until he stood before the willow tree. He ground his teeth and rapped the dripping head with his long stemmed pipe.

"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," he grated. "You were a thousand times more vicious than a wolf or a tiger, but now a great weight has been lifted from our chests!"

From the town came forty soldiers who surrounded the thousand peasants around the tree. They set up a machine gun at the head of the road while Sun, seizing Old Man Shen by the arm, shouted for the peasants to make way. He forced a path through the crowd and pointed towards the tree with his cane.

"Did your son kill him?" he demanded of Shen.

Shen looked at the gory head, then surveyed the faces of the peasants to judge their expressions. "Yes," he said, raising his chest high. "Yes, he killed him."

"Where is he? Turn him over!"

"He went to the People's Liberation Army! Ask them for him, if you dare; I can't produce him!"

Sun laughed coldly. "You can't produce him? Come! String this fellow up beside the head!"

Mrs. Hsiao jumped forward. "A father isn't responsible when the child is grown. What good will it do you to hang the old man? Go look for Tuan!"

"Each man must account for his own acts only. What has it got to do with anyone else?" someone shouted from the crowd.

Behind his black shell-rimmed glasses, Sun's beady eyes peered all around. The situation was getting out of hand. "The matshed settlement is working with the Communists," he shouted, waving his cane in the air. "Burn it down! Move every man, woman and child into the temple for hard labor. . . ." Although Sun was talking big with his mouth, his feet were skating on thin ice. Docilely, he released his grip on Old Man Shen.

"If we're going into the town, let's go," Feng-tse called from the crowd. "Chang paid with his life, because he owed it to someone he wronged. What has it got to do with us peasants?"

There was a movement in the crowd like the swelling of a giant wave surging toward the shore. Men and women, talking angrily, began walking to the town. Just as they reached the south gate, behind them a huge pillar of black smoke swirled into the sky. The matshed homes of twenty-seven families were burning. Machine guns sent bullets whining over the heads of the marching peasants. The more timid of them broke and scattered in all directions. By the time they reached the temple inside the town, there were only ninety members of the matshed settlement present. All the peasants from other villages had gone.

From that day on, every one of them, from fifteen to sixty, without regard to sex, had to perform four hours of hard labor per day repairing the town wall. They were allowed out of the town for three hours each day to beg for food. Anyone who returned late would receive twenty blows of the stick. After two months of this kind of life, the internees could barely stand on their feet.

"Chi's" face became so swollen that his feature were indistinguishable. He lay gasping in the temple, each painful breath seeming to be his last. The weeping Widow Hsueh and Feng-tse carried him to the outdoor platform of the building and let him rest in the sun.

"Oh, the bitter fate of the Hsueh family," wailed the widow. "We're out of the frying pan into the fire! Who can I turn to; in what generation will we ever be able to jump out of this living hell!" She sobbed herself hoarse.

"Chi" opened his eyes a little. "I'll be all right, Ma. Eating the orchid flower poisoned me, but the poison is out now. The swelling will go down in two or three days and I'll be fine."

Angrily, the widow pointed at Feng-tse. "Have you gone blind! How could you give him that stuff to eat? You've made him suffer!"

"Don't scold me, Ma," said Feng-tse, hanging her head. "How was I to know that orchid flower is poisonous? You don't think I'd hurt him on purpose. . . ."

As they were talking, Mrs. Shu rushed over. "It's terrible!" she cried. "Wang San, just as he was going out the town gate to beg, keeled over and yellow juices came pouring out of his mouth. He died in a minute. Jindz, his son, reached out to lift him; then his body twisted and he fell down dead too. Both of them had been poisoned. . . ."

Feng-tse jumped up to go with Mrs. Shu to look at the victims, but Widow Hsueh's remark made them pause. "They died of starvation!" she insisted. "I saw many people die that way near the end of the Manchu Dynasty. Let's go see. . . ."

"Chi" raised an arm as thin as a reed to beckon Feng-tse. "Sister, come here. A father and son die of starvation without a sound right before our eyes, and a family is wiped out! Find Mrs. Hsiao. You and Mrs. Shu talk things over with her. Get some mats that people are sleeping on in the temple and wrap the bodies in them for burial."

Mrs. Shu approached him and took his hand. "You must decide for all of us to leave this place. We'll only starve to death here."

"Sister," said "Chi" quietly, pressing her hand, "a Communist is a strong comrade only when he neither bends nor breaks before flames or bullets. You must never forget how your husband was killed. . . ."

Her bones turned as soft as cotton wool and Mrs. Shu lightly sat down on the stone platform. "I'm not afraid to die, 'Chi'. It's just that we've been talking about soon, soon. But for nearly two weeks nothing has happened. I feel so impatient. I'm afraid you'll —"

"Be patient a little longer. Let *them* know about the two deaths today. For future contacts arrange to meet at the big grave mound. Whatever you do, don't let anyone see you. They're on a closer watch here the past few days. Now go!"

Mrs. Shu stood up. "You can sleep peacefully. I'll do just what you've told me."

XVIII

The swelling on "Chi's" face gradually receded, and with the PLA coming ever closer to Newstream, the temple internees were seen to smile much more frequently. The Kuomintang clique in town were busy night and day moving their families to the supposed safety of Huai City.

With a big grin, Old Man Shen, carrying a bowl of black soup and a handful of soy beans, came to see "Chi" one afternoon. "When Bu was moving earth at Sun's compound wall today, he got a half bucket of water that someone used to wash out their cauldron. It's full of rice grains. Drink it; and I've brought you some soy beans!"

"The blind man still sharpens the knife long after it's gleaming bright. It's time to strike!"

"They're moving," chuckled the old man. "They were at it all night without a stop. Today . . . ."

"Chi" drank two bowls of the soup and swallowed the soy beans. Immediately, he seemed to gain considerable energy. He rose, and still pretending to be crippled, leaned on his staff to hobble to the rear of the temple courtyard. There he stared for a long time at the large fortress nearby.

The fortress had been erected within the high sloping earthen walls which surrounded Sun's property and his "Living Hell". The compound housed the police force and also contained a large arsenal and grain bins. These walls were even better constructed than the wall which enclosed the town. There was barbed wire running along the top of them. None of the peasants dared to come in contact with the wire — said to have been made in America — because they believed that it was charged and that to touch it was to die. "Chi" had often heard that rumor and he didn't know whether to credit it or not.

The temple stood in the northeast corner of the town between the town wall and Sun's compound wall. By standing on the sloping roof on the west side of the temple, "Chi" was able to have a good view of the inside of the compound. As he peered at the firing slots in the tall fortress tower, suddenly he saw a big black dog, panting, its tongue lolling, slowly creep out from under the barbed wire. It leaped over a small moat, curled up its tail and ran off.

"Chi" looked more closely at the spot where the dog had crossed. It had been worn round and smooth, indicating that the dog had gone back and forth under the wire in the same place many times. "Chi" laughed as he said to himself, "They're bluffing! With the kind of electricity they're using, that American wire fence can't even stop a dog! If I can blow up the arsenal, that would fix everything!"

After it was pitch dark, "Chi" still sat on the roof wrapped in thought. Feng-tse climbed up beside him.

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded. "Everyone is asleep and you're still squatting here."

"Chi" opened his mouth to reply when he noticed two dark figures walking down the street in the direction of the temple. He tugged at Feng-tse's leg. Softly, she squatted beside him.

As the men came closer, one of them could be heard saying, "There's been something bad in the wind the last few days. You'd better not go to San Hua's place. You don't want them to do you what they did to Chang. . . ."

"Balls! Those Communist yokels don't scare me!" boasted the other.

"Do you mean you still love this place too much to leave it?"

"Balls! You're all chicken-hearted. The least little thing and you start yelling 'Emergency! Alarm!' We've sent the women and kids away. I could hold this place single-handed. . . ."

Suddenly, out of the darkness rushed an object making a horrid noise. Terrified, the men turned and ran pell-mell. An instant later they both fell headlong with a gurgling splash into a slimy ox wallow. "Help! Help!" they sputtered. The panicky Kuomintang soldiers on guard inside and outside Sun's compound wall began firing blindly in all directions. All night, the racket continued.

An investigation made the next morning revealed that an old sow had escaped from her pen. Her squeal of fright upon running into the two worthies — a platoon leader and a lieutenant in the police force — had sent them tumbling into the ox wallow and nearly drowned them. Neither of them had even dared to draw his pistol.

When "Chi" was informed of what had happened, he took Feng-tse aside and said, "The Kuomintang began its artillery barrage against this town on the twenty-fourth of December, 1946. They occupied it on the twenty-eighth. Today is the twenty-eighth of

March, 1948, exactly fifteen months. We've come through! You'll have to risk slipping out. Tell them I have everything ready!"

Skipping for joy, Feng-tse took his hand. "Don't worry. I know how to get through. . . ."

Taking a broken basket, she went with Mrs. Shu. They reported to the outside and returned without incident.

That night at midnight, "Chi" made a circle of inspection around the temple building. There was not a sound. He went back and shook Feng-tse awake.

"Get up. It's nearly time. I'm going. Don't tell Mama. When you hear the sound of firing, gather everybody at the temple and wait for me to come back." He quietly stole away.

Sleepily forcing open her eyes, Feng-tse found that he was already gone. She sat up and prodded Mrs. Hsiao, "He's gone. . . ." The sound of her voice startled the widow into wakefulness. Jumping to her feet, she mumbled, "I — 'Chi'. . . ." Feng-tse put her hand over her mother's mouth. "No . . ." warned Feng-tse.

Mrs. Shu quietly awakened Old Man Shen and Bu. They all sat in the hall of the temple and waited.

Feng-tse ran lightly to the rear of the temple and looked at the fortress tower within Sun's compound wall. Lights were burning in the tower and the arsenal building was still intact. She returned to the front of the temple and, seating herself on the stone platform, peered continuously from one direction to another. Suddenly from the southeast three white flares bored into the night sky. She started to call Mrs. Hsiao, but before the words left her mouth there was a tremendous explosion like a collapsing mountain. Sand and dried mud poured down from the temple and the ground trembled and shook. An instant later from all sides came the blare of bugles accompanied by the whistling of artillery shells overhead.

The Yellow Dog Kuomintang soldiers and the Black Dog puppet police were deep in slumber in Sun's compound when the explosion threw them out of their beds to the ground. Scrambling to their feet, without even looking for their rifles, they put their tails between their legs, sunk their heads between their shoulders and rushed outside.

For several days, Sun had been listening to the way the wind was blowing. He had heard that the People's Liberation Army was coming from Shantung Province in countless numbers, that they all were big fellows dressed in tan uniforms, that it took twenty-four

mules to haul one of their field-guns, that the burst of one of their artillery shells wiped out everything within a radius of thirty *li*! Sun's heart skipped and pounded. He secretly sent to the city his two concubines, his daughter, and his foreign and domestic money. He kept his gun with him day and night. Desperately he put everything in order, so that he could flee to the city when the situation reached the critical stage.

That morning the Kuomintang regiment had demanded he produce four hundred men to rush work on the town's fortifications. An all day search couldn't even find four, and he was slapped in the face by a soldier. When night fell, unable to sleep, he sat in bed planning his escape. After many wide-eyed hours, he was about to get up to relieve himself when the huge explosion seemed to crash directly over his bed. He half-rolled, half-crawled out of the door to look. The arsenal and the grainery were burning fiercely. Bullets, hand grenades and artillery shells, roasted by the fire, shook the earth with their explosions. Dazed, Sun was unable to grope his way back to his door. He began calling confusedly for his orderly.

By then "Chi" had hurried back to the temple. "Feng-tse, you go to the south gate," he panted. "Mrs. Hsiao take the main street leading to the east gate; Mrs. Shu cover the section in back of the temple. Get everybody out and lead them into action! Be careful of stray bullets. . . ."

In the time it takes to eat half a bowl of gruel, the streets were filled with cries of: "Turn over your weapons and live! The PLA well-treats prisoners! Give up your guns! . . ."

The company of the puppet police, setting up a trench mortar near the south gate when the explosion split the sky, was thrown into confusion. The captain wanted to lead a platoon to the blazing compound to rescue men and materials, but the cries demanding the surrender of arms changed his mind.

"It looks bad," he said. "They've already entered the town. We'll dash for the west gate and . . . . ."

The sharp crack of a rifle brought him dead to the ground. "Who wants to go with you?" said one of his own men, who had shot him from behind. "We're turning our guns in. . . ."

The PLA had already climbed the south wall and set fire to the fortress above its gate. At the east gate, over thirty of the "Defense Corps" docilely surrendered their arms the minute the rifles began to speak. A whole battalion of Yellow Dogs fled through the north

gate as soon as they saw that things were going badly for them. Hundreds of torches, illuminating half the sky, revealed a red flag flying from "Living Hell".

Trembling, Widow Hsueh crouched in a corner of the temple and prayed, "Buddha, let Tuan come home! Rescue me from this fiery pit. . . ."

Feng-tse, carrying a torch, came down the road, shouting, "The militia has come back! Where are you? Everybody come with me!"

The widow jumped out of the shadows and picked up a stick of wood. "Dear," she shouted, "Hurry and catch Sun alive! Don't leave him free to make more trouble!"

Torch-bearing peasants converged on Sun's compound from the south, east and west gates. Inside, all was one great blaze. "Separate and search," they cried. "He's still here!" In every direction streamed row upon row of flaming torches.

"Chi" was leading the peasants who had been brought by Mrs. Shu. They had been the first to enter the compound. After vainly searching the whole place, they lighted oil-soaked ropes in Sun's oil press shop and hurried toward the northwest.

His nerve completely shattered, Sun had run to the northwest corner of the town wall. Just as he reached there, his legs turned soft and he tumbled head first into a slimy ditch. The Yellow Dogs, running for their lives, trampled over his body. By the time they had all passed and gone over the wall, Sun was like a fat, stuck pig — heavy in the head and light in the feet — lying grunting in the mud, unable to rise.

As she carried her flaming rope, Mrs. Shu was well to the fore of the pursuers. Hearing Sun's groans, she yelled, "Hurry up! He's over here!"

"Chi" quickly caught up with her and thumped the ground with an iron staff. "Who are you?" he demanded of the figure in the ditch. "Put your hands up!"

Slowly Sun raised his head from the ditch. He had lost the little crystal pancakes that were the lenses of his glasses, and peered with turtle's eyes through the empty frames. In the light of the flickering torches, he struggled to rise.

"I'm — coming . . . " he gasped. "Don't kill me . . . " he pleaded.

Old Man Shen rushed up. "Good! The old tiger is here!" He leaped on Sun's back, and grasping his collar, thrust his head back into the mud while shouting, "There isn't any place small enough for you to hide from us. You . . ."

The noise brought the torch-bearing searchers running. They gathered around the ditch. Widow Hsueh saw Bu and Old Man Shen grappling with Sun. She threw herself at him with a cry.

"I'm going to take the revenge due my family for twenty years, bite by bite!" she swore, sinking her teeth into Sun's ear with a death grip.

Tuan hurried forward to embrace "Chi". "You've all been wanting to see the crippled heroine," he yelled to the PLA warriors. "Well, here she is!"

But "Chi" was no longer a cripple! Everyone crowded around and carried him on their shoulders, paying no attention to Sun. A pockmarked soldier pushed his way through and wrung "Chi's" hand.

"Sister, do you remember me?" he asked. "I'm Wang, the deserter you saved. . . ."

Scrutinizing his face, "Chi" thought back. "Didn't you say you were going home and would never be a soldier again?" he inquired in surprise.

Wang squeezed his hand tight. "You sent me over! When I found the PLA, they treated me like a brother. I thought: if I go home, won't the Kuomintang conscript me again? The only thing to do is take up a gun and wipe out all the man-eaters!" He pointed at the approaching fighters. "I'm in the First Platoon, Third Company of the Special Service Battalion. That fellow is my platoon leader."

The man he indicated was Lu, who, with the platoon, was bringing back as prisoners the two hundred odd Kuomintang soldiers who had broken through the north gate. As they drew nearer, Lu noticed the old lady with her teeth clamped hard on the ear of a man who looked like a muddy fat pig. He told his assistant to take charge of the prisoners and went over to her, accompanied by Wang. "Let him go, old lady," Lu urged. "You'll have a chance to state your charge against him. We have our own government now!"

At the sound of his voice, "Chi" raised his head, then ran over to embrace him. "You — aren't you Lu?"

Lu fell back a few steps at the shock of a young girl throwing herself on his bosom. "Who — who are you? I don't recognize you. . . ."

With tears in his eyes, "Chi" blurted, "I'm Liu Ken-sheng."

The rifle on Lu's shoulder clattered to the ground. "What! You're still alive!" Holding his head, Lu sat down abruptly.

Wang, his mouth agape, stared round-eyed at the "girl"!

XIX

After the liberation of Newstream, for miles around, young and old sang this merry song:

Cooked white rice has a fragrant smell,
If the PLA hadn't smashed the Living Hell,
We would never get to know its taste so well!

From far and wide, women and girls hastened to the Newstream market to buy silk thread with which they embroidered gift bags for the PLA. In the shops, the thread sellers were so busy they couldn't have found their backsides with their hands. Mrs. Shu's nine-year-old daughter was very impressed by the lovely gift bags which the peasant women embroidered with brightly colored threads. She read their finely stitched sentiments — *"The Army and the people are one body, united like flesh with bone"; "Although this bag is small its sentiment is true: the Army and the people, eternally of one heart"; "Hurry across the Yangtse, brothers; catching old Chiang Kai-shek will earn you a high honor".* . . . Then the little girl ran home, crying, and insisted that her mother give her some money. With it she bought threads of eleven different colors. For three days she stayed in her room, embroidering a gift bag depicting a lotus flower floating on the water in which a golden fish was swimming. When it was finished, she put the bag in her sleeve and went to see Liu. Presenting him with the bag, she climbed up on his lap.

"Do you think it's nice?" she asked hesitantly.

Liu squinted at the picture artlessly embroidered on the bag. It looked as if it had been drawn with a pencil. The fish was so lifelike, its head and tail seemed to be moving.

"What was your idea of showing the fish in the water?" he asked quickly.

"Aren't you like fish and we like the water?" she laughed. "It's like the song, *'The Army Is the Fish and the People Are the Water.'* That's what I embroidered."

Liu hugged her head and patted her. "You little minx, how did you ever think of that!"

Delighted, she poked out her tongue and skipped happily away.

In every village and hamlet, the women worked late into the moonlit nights making cloth shoes for the PLA. And as they worked, they sang:

Making soldiers' shoes,
We're busy to smooth your way.
With brand-new shoes,
You can cross the Yangtse more quickly.
When you catch Chiang Kai-shek,
We'll all be relieved.

The New Bride made seven pairs of shoes. She had Li write the words "Rescue Husband" on the sole of each shoe, after which she stitched them in with a fine needle. Afraid that she wouldn't be understood she had an explanation written on slips of red paper which she pasted on the soles:

"My husband, Fung, was seized by Chang, the ward boss and forced to become a Yellow Dog soldier. I hope you will liberate him soon and rescue him from the fiery pit."

A few days later, Widow Hsueh had worked right through lunch hour. She was busy finishing her last pair of shoes. Feng-tse was cutting patterns for women who wanted to make embroidered gift bags. That was how Liu found them when he returned from regimental headquarters.

As he entered the room, he smiled and said, "Ma, tomorrow at the grave mound, we're going to hold a meeting of thirty thousand people and soldiers to celebrate the victory and in memorial to those who gave their lives. We're striking back now all over the country and the army is very busy. It may be that the unit here will have to leave quite soon."

"Will you be leaving too?" Feng-tse put in quickly.

Liu turned to her with a smile. "Of course."

Feng-tse kept her head down. A painful expression fleeted across her face. When Liu looked her way again, she had already forced an appearance of cheerfulness and was walking briskly out the door to spread the announcement of the meeting.

The peasants went into a joyous turmoil at the news of the coming victory celebration. Every home was swept clean; people

made flags, hung colored bunting, bought firecrackers, rushed busily back and forth without cease.

From dawn until noon the next day, Newstream resounded with the boom of cannons, the sputtering of machine guns and the popping of firecrackers. From all the surrounding countryside came Yangko dancers, children's groups, men and women, big and small — mountains and oceans of people, beating cymbals and drums, carrying flags and bearing gifts — to assemble in open grassy fields outside the town wall. A wagon groaning beneath its load of shoes for the soldiers and pulled by three great yellow oxen, together with three wheelbarrows full of gift bags, moved along with the huge mass of humanity flowing to the meeting place.

Everyone gathered in an enormous field. On its four sides were moon gates made of white bunting on each of which were hung five-colored balls of cloth as big as ladles. Above the main gate on a panel of golden yellow, "We see the sun again" was inscribed in bright red paint, in letters as big as chaff sifters. A thirty-six feet high triumphal arch was erected in the center of the speakers' platform. Covering the arch were forty-eight chaff sifters on which were painted workers, peasants, youth, women, students, merchants and other cartoons of various colors — all surrounding a picture of PLA soldier carrying a big red flag. On both sides of the platform were brocaded flags of red and green piled one upon the other. In a big open space in the center of the field Yangko teams, stilt dancers, drum dancers, manipulators of paper lions, dragons and boats — twisted, leaped, sang, recited, talked and laughed. They seemed to have left the ground and floated into the sky like multi-colored clouds. They swirled before your eyes until you were no longer sure whether it was the earth, the sky or people in motion.

Pictures of Chairman Mao and Commander-in-chief Chu Teh were hung over the exact center of the speakers' platform. Above the pictures, on a red and green cloth background was written, "It is through your leadership that we have today!" In front of the platform a large red banner was draped, reading, "Joint Meeting of the Army and the People to Celebrate the Victory and in Memorial to the Martyrs".

The military band began to play and twenty-four cannons and thirty-two heavy machine guns opened their mouths and poured their fire into the sky. Feng-tse led the young women on to the

platform to present flowers and the gift bags. With sixteen older women, Widow Hsueh mounted the platform to make the presentation of the shoes. Liu Ken-sheng was the last to come forward. He presented two potted evergreens to the regimental commander. Accepting the gifts, Commander Wu addressed the assemblage.

"What we are celebrating today is that our mothers and fathers, and sisters and brothers have jumped from their living hell, never to return. May you always flourish, like these two evergreens and develop your production." Wu lightly set the plants down and continued, "Comrade leaders and fighters, we meet in memorial to our martyrs. Never forget them! They did not shed their blood in vain; they gave it in exchange for a bright shining world! In that big grave mound there is buried the little sister of the Hsueh family. She took the place of one of our warrior heroes. How can we repay these fathers and mothers of ours? . . ."

Like iron hammers, the fists of the fighters thrust straight into the sky. "Take Nanking!" they cried. "Capture Chiang Kai-shek alive! Liberate all of China!"

Liu Ken-sheng rose to his feet. "I was the one for whom the Hsueh family gave Chi, their youngest daughter, so I could leap from the pit of death. For fifteen months I wore her clothes. I pretended to be a cripple and never spoke to strangers. Today we have left the death pit forever. I want to shoulder my gun, cross the Yangtse, smash into the crystal palaces of Nanking, capture Chiang Kai-shek alive, repay the loving kindness of Widow Hsueh! . . ."

Old Man Shen, his small beard thrust out before him, was gay and chipper as he mounted the platform. "Ten days ago, the peasants in this living hell were all doomed. Today I can get up here and make you tolerate my old man's chatter. . . ." Shen chuckled, and went on, "It was in the living hell that the people died, were poverty-stricken, where their fields went to waste. No matter how you looked at it, as long as the living hell existed, there was no hope of life for us. Then the PLA came and our worries were over. . . ." The old man, laughing happily, stood straight and firm on the speakers' platform, and tens of thousands of peasants laughed with him.

"All unite together," they shouted with one voice. "Support the People's Liberation Army! Smash across the Yangtse! . . ."

At dusk, the chairman announced the meeting to be at an end. But the peasants who had come a long distance had made preparations before they left home to escort the troops toward the front. As soon as they left the meeting grounds, they split into small groups and set up cauldrons in the fields to cook the food they had brought with them. Seated along the roadsides, they waited for the army to march.

Little children, hearing the adults say "The PLA is leaving", and not knowing that this meant leaving for the front, brought bricks from the demolished Kuomintang fortifications and built a "Great Wall" athwart the main road to prevent the PLA from going! When the regimental chief of staff came out to urge the peasants to return home, he saw many little towers of bricks linked across the road, with a child sleeping in each one of them. Only after he offered an explanation to each child individually, did they consent to clear the road.

At the call, "The army is moving on!", the peasants awakened. They rubbed their eyes and shook the earth from their hair. Covered with mud like oxen, they hurried down the road, shouting, "Smash across the Yangtse! Smash across the Yangtse! Smash across the Yangtse!" And the fighters took up their cry.

The army, the peasants, stretching eight groups abreast, began moving forward. Their numbers were far too many for the road, and they overflowed into the fields on both sides of it. The peasants among the fighters, the fighters among the peasants, from one horizon to the next, without end, advanced like a moving mountain.

Everywhere along the road were peasants waiting with jugs of tea. One old lady was stretching forth her hands with a full bowl in each and shouting, "Comrades! Victory tea! Drink some. . . ." The Young Women's Groups, the Children's League, the elementary school students, dancing and singing, embraced the army comrades.

Finally, the regimental commander addressed the people. "Before us is the Grand Canal. Dear parents, please go back. I swear to you on behalf of the entire regiment that we'll exchange our flesh and blood for Chiang Kai-shek, to repay your goodness. . . ."

The peasants crowded around the men of the PLA and shook their hands. "Comrades, you'll take Hsuchow and cross the Yangtse River. We'll go too, as stretcher bearers. See you at the front! We wish you success!" And the soldiers joined them in their victory wishes.

After all the other peasants had gone back, Feng-tse still walked along with the troops. When they began boarding the boats to

cross a river, her heart beat wildly. She rushed forward and grasped Liu by the hand.

"'Chi' . . ." she said, then blushed and hung her head. "Don't forget," she said softly. "No matter how far you go, I'll wait for you till I die!"

"Liu squeezed her hand tight. "You can count on me," he replied quietly.

Until the boats were a long distance from the shore, they continued waving to each other.

Yin Ching-chun

by Han Feng

I

Soldier Yin Ching-chun, lost in thought, stood straight and erect in a knoll of dry trees. Beyond the bamboos, beyond the dark green leaves of the trees, he could see the sunlight-flooded fields. Unconsciously, his hand stroked the barrel of his machine gun, warmed by the sun. Blue rays shimmered along the gleaming metal. Lush star-shaped fruit, fallen to the ground, gave off a fragrance reminiscent of the sweet white apricots of the north in early summer. Here in the south it was almost winter, but a warm pleasant breeze still caressed him. Machine gunner Yin was completely oblivious to the beauties of his surroundings. Like the other fighters in whose midst he stood, he was listening attentively to the words of the political commissar.

The face of Comrade Ma was flushed. He waved his hands as he cried, "Comrades! The bandits of Pai Chung-hsi have been forced from the north by our brother armies. There is only one road left open to them — to flee across the sea. They have united their entire force of over one hundred thousand men into battle formation and are advancing in our direction. They plan to capture Limkong, drive down Luichow Peninsula to its tip, and from there go by boats to Hainan Island. Our job is to cut them off and destroy them.

"Comrades! This task has been given to us by the Party and Chairman Mao. We shall have to cross mountains and rivers; we

must press forward tirelessly to join battle. This will be the decisive battle on China's mainland. If we fight well, our country and our people will be rid of war that much sooner and will be able to go on to the building of a peaceful prosperity. We must clearly understand that all of our bitter struggles in the past were for the sake of this. We who are Party members must display a strong bold heroism. The whole nation is watching us today, watching to see whether we can fulfil our duty. And we say: We will fulfil it one hundred percent! For the sake of our Party, our country, our people, we definitely will wipe out the evil plague for good!

"Speaking for ourselves as individuals, we have earned excellent reputations in past battles. Now we shall fight for more glory, fight to the end!"

The large sweaty hands of the fighters pounded together in applause, like a sudden burst of rain beating on the grassy plain. Even the bamboo leaves rustled and trembled. The men had crossed five mountain ranges in the past two months. Scaling lofty crags, walking through malarial mists, they had come all the way to the South China Sea. The skin on their faces was cracked by the torrid sun and the salt-bearing winds from the ocean. Now they were again stirred by a new task.

"Are we afraid of hardships?" shouted the commissar in a high voice. "No! Because we are an army led by the Communist Party, there are no difficulties or obstacles which we cannot overcome. We are loyal to the Party, to the people, to our country — and this loyalty gives us limitless strength!"

Again there was a storm of applause, then everyone rose. Machine gunner Yin lifted his weapon with his powerful fingers, and left with the others.

That afternoon along the grassy banks of a pool outside the village, all of the Party members divided into small groups to discuss the commissar's report. The last rosy rays of the sun, which had already sunk below the western horizon, tinted the mountain tops.

When the Party meeting was about to start, Yin heard the sound of the whistle. Rushing out, he demanded, "Where do we assemble?"

"It's a meeting of the Party. It's not an assembly call," the whistle blower replied.

Yin was plunged into deep silence. The Party!

The words of the commissar had stimulated him, but now the announcement of the meeting of Party members filled him with despair.

I'm loyal to the Party even if I'm not a Communist, he thought.

While all the Communist Party members were attending the meeting, he sat off by himself, lonely and comfortless. In spite of how hard he fought, in spite of the blood he had shed for the revolution, he was not a Party member. Yin felt miserable.

II

He was the most famous machine gunner in the company. Only twenty-one, Yin already was big and solid. He came from the great plain section of eastern Honan province. In 1938, when Chiang Kai-shek destroyed the dykes and let the Yellow River inundate thousands of square miles, the few possessions of Yin's little home were swept away in the swirling muddy water. Yin's father set out to try to find some means of supporting his family. He was never heard from again. Yin and his mother became refugees. She died of hunger along the road. Yin drifted from place to place. The next few years he begged for food, worked for a while as a cowherd, then became a boatman in the vast Yellow River flooded area. This last job gave him powerful arms and hard calloused hands. When he joined the People's Liberation Army he found a machine gun much lighter than the big oar which he had been wielding on the River. That was in the winter of 1947, during the attack against the armed counter-revolutionaries in central China. By the battle of Huai Hai *, Yin had become an excellent soldier.

He blamed himself bitterly every time he thought of that glorious, famous campaign. He had applied to join the Party and had asked that his merit be appraised by how he acquitted himself in battle. He was a machine gun ammunition carrier then. During attacks, he would carry boxes of ammunition in addition to the ten mortar shells and the two hand grenades stuck in his belt. When an order to charge had been given, he followed the machine gunner into enemy territory. The gunner was felled on open ground. Yin froze for a moment, then grabbed the machine

* This campaign took place on the plains of East China in Winter, 1948-49. As a result 600,000 Kuomintang soldiers were annihilated.

gun, clamped on a box of ammunition belts, and ran forward, firing, to clear a path for the advancing infantry. His bullets exhausted, he joined the charge, while giving cover with his hand grenades.

After the fighting was over, Yin was commended for his bravery.

Because he liked to smoke, he took a fine pipe from a prisoner and put in his knapsack. He really loved that pipe, but he mentioned it to no one.

The next day, his platoon leader invited him out for a chat. As they strolled through a grove of withered date trees outside the village, the platoon leader came to the point.

"You do very well in the fighting. Everyone praises you. But that pipe of yours . . . . Of course it's a small thing, but we have our battlefield discipline. While the pipe itself doesn't mean anything, discipline can't be slighted. Otherwise the prestige of the Party will suffer."

Yin's application to become a Communist was held in abeyance.

Then they crossed the Yangtse and chased an enemy army to the sea and destroyed it completely. They had fought on the tidal mud flats, the salty sea water lapping at their ankles. The soft ooze sucked off their shoes and many of them went barefoot for long periods. A few men broke regulations by taking shoes from the enemy dead and Yin followed their example. He was very regretful afterwards. He hated himself, for he knew clearly that he had done wrong.

Now, when Yin thought back on these things, he cried as though he had been painfully wounded — although when actually wounded in the past he had never shed a tear. Through years of hardship and bitterness — even when his mother had died — he had remained stoical. Only today did his tears flow without cease. . . . His head began to ache dully, his body trembled. . . .

Another attack of malaria.

Near dark, the weather was cooler. From the sea, one hundred *li* away, wafted a soft wind which could almost be grasped by hand. The sweet fragrance of the star-shaped fruit mingled with the odor of the muddy rice paddies and the sun-dried rice stalks. In the room, Yin lay quietly. His forehead was already hot; his breath was harsh and short. Dizzy, he fell asleep.

CHIANG CHAO-HO: Watch on the Yalu River

Later he was awakened by a cool hand, damp with perspiration, being removed from his forehead. The hand undid a button of his tunic and pressed itself against his chest.

"He's sick. What shall we do?" said a voice, then went on, musingly, "The squad will be short of another experienced man. There are so many new comrades. . . ."

Hazily, Yin heard the voice calling him.

"Yin, are you sick?"

"No." Yin forced open his eyes to see Squad Leader Tao beside his bed. Tao's cool hand against his burning body was comforting.

"You're very feverish."

"I felt cold before and I feel hot now. It's not serious. Is your meeting over?"

"Yes."

"Will we hold a squad meeting tonight?"

"We will."

Tao refastened the button and then left. Tao's genuine concern for him again moved Yin to tears!

That night, the whole squad gathered around a feebly flickering oil lamp. Yin had prepared his statement well in advance, and he spilled it out, practically all in one breath.

"Report! This is going to be the last battle on the mainland. No matter how sick I may be, I'll get to the front if I have to crawl there. I'll earn a citation; I'll earn the right to join the Party. Finished!"

It was very late when the meeting finally ended. Walking out of the room into the courtyard, Yin felt lighter. Cheerfully, he followed a narrow path along the bank of a pool which reflected the star-studded sky. There was a cool smell of river mud in the air. He could see a pale-red glow in the window of a lone house at the end of the village. Yin walked to the house, pushed open the door and entered. For a long time, scarcely breathing, he stood beside Cultural Worker Li, writing in the light of the lamp on the table. Rather shyly, he requested Li to help him draw up an application.

Yin's formality and accents were those of a child. Although strong and tall, he had the feeling that everyone was much bigger than he. Watching the movement of the Cultural Worker's

pen, he dictated very slowly, so that Li would not miss a single word.

". . . After the Huai Hai campaign, I broke battlefield discipline. During the fighting in Kwangtung province, I saw others breaking the rules and didn't stop them — in fact I too picked up a pair of shoes. . . . I guarantee that in this campaign I definitely will respond to the Party's call. I'll not only fight well — I'll be a model observer of discipline. Let the Party test me again this time!"

Still Yin wasn't satisfied. He dictated the statement again. Then he gazed at the ceiling and pondered: What else should I say? He wished it were possible to pluck out his heart and let it speak for him. The light shone on his anxious face. Time was fleeting; everything was late. He had taken so many small tortuous side paths. Now he wanted to make a fresh start. Many heavy matters seemed to be crushing him, hindering him from getting on the "Party road".

Yin swallowed hard. "From today on," he said, "with my whole heart and mind, I'll give my all to perform the duties which the Party assigns me."

Beneath his name, he impressed his fingerprint. He rose, folded the paper and departed. Outside, all was still. The reflection of the stars danced on the breeze-ruffled surface of the pool. Yin looked up at the sky. The three stars of Orion's belt were shining directly overhead. Yin stopped; he felt the statement in his pocket. I'll give it to the Party secretary the first thing in the morning, he thought.

III

West of Maoming county in Kwangtung province are endless miles of wild mountains. The PLA fighters constantly had difficulty in finding a road through the thickly wooded forests. For that region, not one black line was shown on their small scale maps. They continued their steady climbing all through the night over mountains that became increasingly high. It was obvious that Yin's illness was getting worse.

Tao, the squad leader, was worried about him. "Take care of yourself, comrade," urged Tao. "Don't ruin your health. Drop out."

Yin refused. "The sickness will pass. I can keep up. Let's go."

Suffering, Yin tottered along the little path. The earth and sky seemed to be revolving, but he hung tenaciously to the rear of the marchers. His ammunition carrier, Jen — a newly liberated fighter — walked with him. Jen was twenty years old. He came from Shantung province. I shouldn't be so silent, Yin thought. I've got work to do. He took a grip on himself and drew a deep breath.

"Jen, are you afraid of fighting?"

"I've never been in battle. . . ."

"Don't be afraid. After you've been through it once, you'll know what to do."

"Will you be able to fight when you're so sick?"

"Sure! I'll be cured the minute the battle starts. Being sick doesn't mean anything. It's only temporary." Yin fought for breath and continued, "The sound of rifles used to scare me. I'd shiver when I heard one, and my heart would beat fast. Then we held a grievance-telling meeting. We got to the roots of our past miseries. And those roots were Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang reactionaries. They sat on us so hard we couldn't turn around! It was because of them that we suffered. Strange, as soon as we thought of our sufferings we became brave. The tougher the enemy, the fiercer our hatred became. We wanted to revenge our fathers and mothers, to revenge the poor people. . . . Our troubles now are only for a little while. After they've passed there'll be prosperity. When did hardships ever kill anyone? But our prosperity will be for all future generations. . . ."

Many mountains were left behind in the east as they talked. The sun, hanging in the western sky, roasted their faces. Yin's face was bathed in perspiration. His illness already was abating.

The noise of artillery fire was closer that day, and the sound of heavy machine guns could be heard.

The troops entered a village and crowded into an extremely dirty courtyard. Sitting on their knapsacks, they waited. A field kitchen was set up on one side. Sharp chops of the vegetable cleaver blended with the chatter of a distant machine gun. Flames seemed to envelop the suspended cauldron while the water bubbled and overflowed. When the slightly built political commissar pushed his way through the crowd, the men greeted him with

applause. He brought his hand to the brim of his cap in a salute, and the fervor of the applause increased.

The political commissar waved a tightly clenched fist. "We're going to throttle the neck of the Luichow Peninsula and wipe out all of the enemy who are trying to flee. We shall bring to a victorious conclusion the final battle on the mainland. . . ."

The atmosphere was charged with tension. Yin fished through his pockets for his statement. Stepping over his machine gun, he grabbed the Party secretary with a large paw.

"Secretary — I'm giving you this!"

Taking his hand, the Party secretary scrutinized his face. "Comrade, you'd better stay in the rear with the Quartermaster."

Yin was frantic. For a moment he couldn't speak. His lips were trembling.

"But I've made up my mind. . . ."

"I know. But you're sick."

"No! I'm better already. There's nothing wrong with me."

The Party secretary looked at him closely. He accepted the stubborn machine gunner's "Statement of Determination". Then he nodded in assent. In time of battle there was so much heroic conduct which could move one to tears. There was nothing he could say. The Party would not forget the deeds of a single comrade.

After they had eaten, the men gathered at the place of assembly. Standing behind Yin, Jen was anxious.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"Fine! I'm better now."

Touched, Jen looked at him. Yin's face was yellow and bloodless. The new fighter couldn't understand this mystery. Yin had had three attacks of malaria fever, but he still was as unyielding as an iron rod. Just now he had only drunk one bowl of rice gruel; how could he possibly go on? This big fellow sooner or later is going to collapse on the road, thought Jen.

Yin turned his head and spoke to him. "Is the ammunition all in order? The belts should be loaded and oiled."

"Everything is ready."

"When the fighting starts, stay close behind me. Don't lose me, eh?"

"Don't worry. Wherever you go, I'll be there."

In the short time they knew one another, they had already become very good friends. Friendships are formed most quickly in battle campaigns, and they are the closest kind. Yin had to teach his battle comrade how to fight, how to be firm.

"There's nothing frightening about the fighting," said Yin. "Just remember: the bolder we are, the softer the enemy becomes. If we move slowly when we charge, the enemy has time to aim. If we rush and fire at the same time, the enemy won't have a chance to return a shot. You stick close to me. When I tell you to drop, you drop. When I tell you to charge, you charge. This is our chance to earn honors serving the people!"

It was deep night and a half-moon shone on the bare mountain ridges. The attacking forces of the PLA set out across the heights and valleys toward the village of Bow Yu.

IV

Fleeing to the northwest, the enemy had first destroyed the bridge across the narrow but swiftly flowing Pak Lo River. Our pursuing troops were halted on its eastern bank. On both sides of the river were high mountains. Ignoring the protests of his comrades, Yin jumped into the stream, with three other men. They swam across the turbulent waters to the opposite bank. Beneath the cliff, they found a large log raft and dragged it into the river, crossways, athwart the flow of the current.

Yin was a fine swimmer, but standing shoulder deep in mid-stream, he had a hard time to keep from being washed away by the rushing blue waters. Swimming desperately with one hand, with the other he held the raft in place between the river banks, while another man laid planks across the top of the logs to make a pontoon bridge. River water in winter is hardly a good thing for a sick man. Yin was unable to keep his feet. White capped waves buffeted him till he floated on the surface of the water. Gritting his teeth, he forced his feet down against the river bottom and held the raft in place again. The next time he was flung up, Yin's face was ghastly. With two powerful strokes, he swam to the shallows on the opposite side and tied the raft to a remaining support of the destroyed bridge. Then he swam back and climbed ashore. He staggered. Another attack of malaria. . . .

Squad Leader Tao hurried over to him. "Let me take your machine gun," he said worriedly. "You follow slowly in the rear."

He didn't have the heart to scold Yin for going into the water. That was to his credit; it wasn't something wrong.

"I'll be alright in a minute."

Jen loaded all of Yin's equipment on to his own back. Yin's whole body was consumed with fever. His eyes were red. Walking was going to be difficult. He could barely stand.

"Rest for a while, then go," Jen urged him.

"I don't have to. A sickness is this way — if you humor it you won't even be able to move half a step. It'll be just as bad whether I go or not." Yin was determined to keep up with the march. What if the squad had some duty and there was no one to take the lead? When he thought of this, Yin's weakness left him.

His body burned like fire, his head ached. Yin didn't want to talk to anyone, only to keep mechanically moving his legs. The barren mountains and the glaring sun swayed dizzily before his eyes. His lips were parched and cracked. If he ever went down, he would never be able to get up again. Dazed, it seemed to Yin that he wasn't walking but that he was in the water, his body going where the waves took it. . . .

The gruelling effects of his illness plus marching without respite sometimes made his thoughts conflict with one another. It was odd, he mused. Every time he thought of himself, and pitied himself, he immediately felt terribly weak, as if he were going to collapse. Yet the moment he thought of the cause of the revolution and the Party, he became strong and his legs gained added vigor.

Towards evening, the wind swept across the western ridges. Blowing against his hot body, the coolness relieved Yin as though releasing him from a flaming cage. The redness receded from his bloodshot eyes.

"Jen," he cried, "I'm well!"

Jen placed his hand against Yin's forehead. It was cool and moist. Yin's fever was gone.

"Hey! You've come through it. I thought you weren't even going to be able to get up that last big mountain."

Yin laughed. "You don't know the half of it. I couldn't breathe when we were climbing. I didn't have an ounce of strength. Then I thought: Being a people's soldier is no easy matter. We have to do things other people can't. As we push

on ahead, the people in the rear can have a good life. My heart was singing softly: . . . *Communist Party of China, you are the kernel, you are the direction. We will go along with you forever.* . . . That was how I got over that mountain, that was the source of my strength. As soon as you realize that your hardships are glorious, they don't seem difficult any more. How far have we come?"

"Over eighty *li*. You were ill for sixty of them."

V

The night was cold, and the wind howled across the wide rolling plain. Rocked by the gale, the pines hissed like billows in a great sea. On the plain, tiny frost particles glistened in the moonlight. Huddled together in a patch of waist-high grass and scrub pines on a mountain top, a group of soldiers were sleeping soundly. Before them paced a sentry, a white coverlet thrown across his shoulders. He held his hands in his sleeves as he peered across the expanse of open ground. From far away North China an icy wind came raiding against the sleeping men.

They were a platoon of the army which, in pursuit of the enemy, yesterday had marched one hundred *li* to a town in Luchuan county in Kwangsi province. Now the platoon had been sent ahead to scout. Yin slept next to his squad leader. Because he had been ill, the men made him lie in the middle to protect him from the cold. Even so, he awakened several times, shivering.

The forced march of the previous day had cut off the enemy's escape route down the peninsula. Stopped at Limkong, the enemy had fled northwest to mass on the south bank of the Si Kiang River. They were the 175th Division, the main force of Pai Chung-hsi, warlord of Kwangsi province and a leading henchman of Chiang Kai-shek.

The platoon awakened at dawn. Gazing into the distance from the mountain top, they could see little specks of flame, followed a few seconds later by the sound of firing. The situation had changed; the enemy was moving up from behind them. Yin walked over to his sleeping ammunition carrier and prodded him lightly with his foot.

"Get ready. The enemy's come knocking at our door."

As the day brightened they could plainly see the enemy coming toward them in groups over the mountain ridges. The platoon leader immediately ordered the men forward to meet them. Spreading out, the PLA fighters moved quickly through the tall brown grass to a grove of small pines. The enemy was only three *li* away.

Soon the firing was brisk. As far as the eye could see, on every height, in every grove, were PLA and enemy machine guns. A large body of enemy men and horses were crowded together beside a small stream. They started to flee toward the mountains on the north.

A messenger brought an order from the regimental commander: "Stop them."

Yin picked up his machine gun. With a "Follow me!" he ran with the rest of the platoon. They had to drive back the enemy's flank guard before they could cut straight into the main body. They had pursued as far as the foot of a high ridge, when suddenly from above bullets came streaming down like swarms of locusts. On the top of the ridge, the enemy had set up two heavy machine guns, as well as several light machine guns and automatic rifles.

The platoon decided to move straight up the face of the mountain. Yin ran forward a distance with the others, placed his machine gun in the fork of a tree and began firing. Enemy bullets cut off the tree's leaves and branches. Cradling the gun in his arms, he leaped from beside the tree to behind a boulder, and from there into a grove of trees. Jen, who had followed close behind, handed him a fresh box of loaded ammunition belts. The platoon took cover in a depression halfway up the mountain. They were very close to the enemy now. They rested a few minutes to catch their breaths. A hail of enemy bullets whizzed low overhead. All around, grass was flattened by the flying projectiles. The enemy turned on them its entire fire power.

A cold chill ran down Yin's spine and he began to shiver. Jen called to the squad leader.

"Damn it! His malaria has come back. . . ."

Squad Leader Tao was dumbfounded. He stared at Yin. The machine gunner's face was like yellow wax. The gun trembled violently in his hands, but his lips were locked tight.

No one had thought that the attack of malaria would come in the middle of a charge. The situation was bad. The platoon

leader had been killed; one squad had been stopped. They were left with only a few rifles and three machine guns.

Tao was worried. Attacking was a difficult business for everyone — himself included. His legs were covered with scars. During the attack on the ancient capital of Loyang he had been hit in the left leg; in the Huai Hai campaign his right leg had been wounded. The wounds left him virtually crippled. To make matters worse, during their rush a few minutes ago, bamboo stubble had pierced through the sole of one of his cloth shoes into his foot.

He wasn't concerned with these personal problems. What did bother him was the machine gunner, suffering his fifth bout of malaria.

"Is it serious?" Tao asked Yin grimly. "Suppose you stay here. Don't go up any further."

Jen reached out his hand to take the weapon, but the machine gunner held him off. Yin spoke to the squad leader in a voice which shook.

"Serious or not, I'm going up!"

"Give me the gun," Jen urged.

Yin held the weapon tight in his trembling hands. "No. If I can go up, I can carry the gun. Give me some ammunition!"

They started their charge; but the moment they went into action, the enemy deluged them with a rain of flying lead. The wrath of the machine gunner was aroused. His eyes shone with a vengeful gleam. He was going to come through this test, he was going to earn another qualification to become a glorious Party member, he was going to be victorious on every score: he would conquer his illness; fighting stubbornly he would wipe out the enemy to the last man!

Through the waist-deep grass, they moved quickly toward the enemy. They could see the swarthy visage of the man who was sweeping a wide arc with a heavy machine gun. Two other men were feeding the ammunition belts. Suddenly the whole squad stood up and fired a fierce volley at the emplacement. The heavy machine gun was struck; the gunner pitched forward headlong. They rushed and took the position. There were two bodies beside the heavy machine gun. The remaining enemy scattered and fled.

"Lay down your arms! Lay down your arms and be well treated!" shouted Jen. He was very happy.

The PLA pressed forward in pursuit. The plain was like a hunting field. Everywhere there was chase, everywhere there was shouting, everywhere was the sound of firing.

When the fighting was over, the prisoners were all assembled. Holding the machine gun, Jen came out of a narrow path in a paddy field, carrying Yin on his back. Jen was almost in tears.

"As soon as it was over, he fell down in the rice paddy," he gasped. "He's weak as a kitten! . . ."

The men became silent. They lowered Yin to the ground. The purpose in his heart had kept the machine gunner going. All the hardship, endurance, struggle, had not been for his own sake, but for the great and splendid ideal which was within him. Because he was completely willing to endure the painful torture, he had said time and again: "I'm already better!" He had never revealed his suffering to the others, because they all were the same as he.

Yin's face was deadly pale, but there was a faint smile around the corners of his mouth.

VI

After the battle, the men began a forced march which was to last five days and five nights. Because Pai Chung-hsi's army, gathered south of the Si Kiang River, was fleeing toward Yamchow, our forces had to head them off. On both sides of the Golo Range, a long distance race started, of over five hundred *li*.

Tensely, the political commissar examined the map. They had to cover one hundred *li* every day, without a stop. This would be a severe test for the men.

"To fulfil this task," he told the cadres, "our men will require a high degree of new heroism. I call on our warriors to be hard and glorious to the finish. Hear me, Communists! To fulfil this task, you must override all difficulties. Zealously stand at the fore and lead the forces by the model of your conduct."

Again his eyes returned to the map. The dense black whorls representing the mountains and the line upon line of rivers made him frown. There were many formidable obstacles in the path of the march route. Now, the time had come to overcome them all, to persevere through every hardship. "We must make this clear to the men," he said repeatedly.

Five hundred *li*. That meant crossing five hundred *li* of high blue mountains in the Golo Range, and swift turbulent rivers. It was impossible to calculate how much determined will the men would need to scale the barriers. For the victory of the people, what price would the fighters have to pay for every inch of ground! The soles of the men's shoes were as thin as paper. The flesh of their feet came right through many of them. It was on this flesh that they would walk across the mountains.

The regimental commander issued his orders: "Now we are going to advance, regardless of everything. It will not be a case of a short rest every fifteen *li*, a long rest every thirty, and make camp after sixty. We'll walk, and walk, and keep walking. This is an order!"

Yin had recovered quickly after he had fainted on the battlefield, but during the first day of the forced march Jen developed blisters as big as dates on both his feet. Each step was agony. He simply couldn't walk. Yin relieved Jen of all his equipment and supported the boy with one hand under his armpit. They fell behind the rest of the marchers. For a long time Jen kept his head down and did not speak.

"Are you crying?" Yin asked him.

"N — No. . . ."

"Don't cry! Why should we cry? You've always hated the Kuomintang reactionaries. They oppressed and insulted me plenty. They didn't let us poor people live. And they grabbed us for their dirty army, to give our lives for them. If it weren't for them, we wouldn't have had to suffer anything."

They didn't make camp until it was very late at night. Jen lay down the moment he entered the door. Yin brought a basin of warm water from the kitchen, and after removing Jen's shoes, gently washed his feet. Raw red flesh showed where the clumps of mud had been. Then Yin bandaged the feet lightly, carried Jen to his bed and covered him.

By now, everyone was asleep. Yin began to eat his supper. The food was cold. He couldn't make himself swallow a morsel. He tried to stand, but the moment he put weight on his feet he had to sit down again. His eyes blacked out. He couldn't even see the light of the oil lamp. His head and eyes ached terribly. He stared at the place where the lamp stood. After a while, the flame gradually returned to view. It got bigger and brighter.

Again he tried to stand. Both feet pained as if he were standing on needles, but he steeled himself to walk step by step to his bed.

Jen turned over and looked at him. "You're still not sleeping?"

"I'm all right. You go back to sleep. I'm only worried about how you're going to walk tomorrow."

Grateful for his anxious words, Jen replied, "I'm worried too. On the road today I thought: We're not marching with our feet, we're marching with our hearts! There had to be determination in every step, or I couldn't have gone on."

Yin lay down. "And we'll keep going on! After the whole country is liberated and victory is won, our feet will be a credit to us. We ought to give them citations, special citations!"

VII

The path was like an interminable ribbon, now climbing to the peaks, now dropping into the dark narrow valleys. The marchers only stopped one hour for their meals and rest. By the time the cook began scrubbing the cauldron, the vanguard column was already again in motion.

It was winter, and at night there were frequent falls of fine misty hail which soaked through the men's thin clothing. Flowery frost patterns appeared on the blue barrels of the rifles. Water-filled rice paddies became irregular sheets of glass; treading the narrow raised walks, the men seemed to be skirting along mirror rims.

Yin's body was soaked with perspiration; his clothes, damp and chilly, clung to his spine. Sleep was overpowering him, heavily pressing his eyelids closed. He was no longer walking, but rather weaving, forward. The glaring white frost seemed to his eyes a stretch of sea, covering everything, overflowing. In his dream, the enemy was fleeing through the water. Frantic, he tried to pursue, but he couldn't move his legs. Then the sea engulfed him with a rush, and he was tossed and buffeted. . . . Yin's legs suddenly went soft. He was about to fall when he was shocked into wakefulness. In a cold sweat, he found that he had walked into a small water-filled ditch.

Immediately, Yin's eyes again began to close. While his body swayed from side to side, his mind was indolently riding on a cloud. His burning feet were in the cool lovely water. Nothing could be more comfortable. . . . Happily, he kicked and played. . . .

"Keep moving! You've fallen asleep!"

Someone pushed him hard from behind and he woke with a start. He had fallen almost twenty feet behind the marcher in front of him. Slapping his forehead sharply a couple of times, Yin made great strides until he caught up. For a long stretch he fought with himself, keeping his eyes open by force of staring.

The road crossed a small bridge, then plunged into a deep forest and up the mountain. It was late at night and bitterly cold. The moonlight on the leaves glistened like moisture. Everything was cold, damp. The men felt immersed in ice water. There was no warmth anywhere. Slowly, silently, they clambered up the great mountain. When the vanguard halted for a moment, the men bringing up the rear at once fell flat and, wrapped in thin coverlets, began to snore on the damp ground.

Yin was really exhausted. He could lie down anywhere and sleep for three days straight. Since the forced march started, he had only had a total of three hours sleep, during the first day. Thereafter, he hadn't closed his eyes. He curled up on the side of the road and fell into a deep slumber, though the moist ground chilled half of his body. From the head of the march column came the call, "Let's go — oh!"

Yin leaped to his feet, but his legs, stiffer and more painful than before he had laid down, immediately collapsed beneath him. Many men were still sleeping; others were making laborious efforts to stand. He clutched the machine gun and strenuously wrenched himself upright. His eyes focused clearly again. Yin gave a loud shout.

"Comrades! This is hardship. We can't let it get us down. Forward!"

The men all stood up. The climb continued.

A twisting winding path inched up the precipitous height. How fierce and cold was the wind on the mountain! But before long, huge Mount Niulan was left behind them, looking like a solitary peak rising out of the ocean.

The long night passed. As the sun rose in the east, the sound of singing floated up from the banana orchards:

Forward, forward, forward —
Our army advances, warmed by the sun.
With our feet treading our nation's ground,
The hopes of the people are borne on our backs.
We are an invincible force!
. . . . . .

The political commissar turned around. With sunken eyes he looked at the line of marchers from whom the song welled forth. In circumstances like these, he thought happily, they still can sing! . . . This is the most moving thing of all!

VIII

There was no time for sleep. An order came over the radio fixing the time within which they had to reach their destination. The distance was no longer figured in days and nights, but in miles and hours.

As the fighters forded the wide Wuliyu River, the political commissar sat on the bank, carefully counting the men of a company. His calculations showed that eighty percent of them walked with limps.

"How is it that so many of them have ruined their feet?" he anxiously asked a political instructor. Aren't there any who can walk normally?"

The political instructor was worried. "Not one. They've all wrecked their feet. Their joints became painful when they put their burning feet into the cool water. Crossing the river does it. It makes them limp worse." The political instructor walked on. He was limping too.

Another soldier hobbled by on crude crutches.

"Who is that?" the commissar asked the next man in line.

"His name is Jen."

"Why doesn't he drop out?"

"He doesn't want to."

In order to understand the situation of the men, the commissar followed the group which had just gone by. He knew that the soldier to whom he had spoken was the one who had joined in a charge while suffering badly from illness. The commissar remembered his name well after that incident. He was known as a man of iron. Some people did not fear the enemy but were overwhelmed by personal difficulties. This man, however, was afraid of nothing and remained firm wherever he was. The commissar began a conversation with him.

"How are the feet of the men in your squad?"

"All gone bad! Only my case is light. I just broke four blisters — one of them infected."

The commissar was startled. "But you walk as if there was nothing wrong. . . ."

"The more you limp the more effort you waste."

"It's really rough this time. No wonder there are men who are willing to fight, but who hate to march."

"That's the truth, Commissar. We all feel the same way. But we'd never get to any place where we *could* fight if we didn't march. Of course the marching is rough. But we can take it!"

This simple answer moved the commissar deeply. Not eighty percent, but one hundred percent of the fighters had injured their feet. Yet they continued to advance, not stopping a minute. Yesterday they had eaten one meal, then marched through the night. Now, just as they reached a planned resting point, the order arrived to continue marching. Both rest and meal times were eliminated.

They certainly are giving all they have for the cause of the Party, thought the commissar. How many bitter trials must a man experience before he changes from an ordinary inconsequential person to a man who will sacrifice himself for the benefit of the Party, the country and the people! . . . I must check through every Party branch at once and go through the material of every comrade who applied for membership during battle. When he thought of this, the commissar's heart was gay.

He turned to a newspaper reporter by his side. "History should record these hardships. Because of them, we know still better how to build a prosperous life in the future!"

IX

It appeared on the map as "Cockscomb Peak, altitude 5,244 feet". The fighters, tired, hungry and in pain, had to cross this peak before they could go into battle. They hadn't eaten or slept for two days.

Yin was having great difficulty in keeping going. The five attacks of malaria had turned his face thin and sallow, but to lead the new comrades, he had to hold out. He couldn't be the first to fall. The soles of his feet were completely lacerated. Every step on the raw tender flesh shot a bolt of pain right to his head. The whole weight of his body sagged downward. Burdened by the inexorable pressure of the machine gun and two knapsacks, in addition he was supporting Jen, who leaned on him heavily. Several times, Yin

became so feverish with hunger that sparks danced before his eyes and he felt faint and dizzy.

The road took a sudden steep incline up the mountain. Many of the men sat down, their faces colorless. Supporting his ammunition carrier, Yin continued toward the peak. His body was a mass of perspiration; he was gasping desperately. Then Jen slipped from his grasp and slumped to the ground.

"I just can't go on. There's no strength left in me."

"It's hunger. I'll help you."

"I can't move. . . ."

"Not at all? Come on, try!"

He looked at Jen. The ammunition carrier was wolfing a handful of raw rice. Distressed beyond words, Yin took him by the arm and they crawled forward. Now Yin was no longer perspiring; he was burning dry body heat. Again and again he bit his lips. . . . His eyes went black . . . he couldn't go on. . . . Death — the word flashed into his mind; involuntary tears flowed from his eyes. . . . He was finished! He was leaving the Party, his comrades; he was leaving the great thunderous cause. . . . If I have any strength, I can get by. . . . I've come through the last few days and nights; I was able to stand hunger and sickness. . . . For the people, I can endure all — all. . . . He savagely mustered his resources. Some men had already reached the summit! But he had consumed his last bit of strength. Yin fell to the ground. Everything was dark.

"Yin, Yin! . . ." Jen was crying hysterically. "Squad Leader! — Yin has collapsed! . . ."

But Yin still was not completely spent. He took a deep gasp of the cool fresh air and revived. Through half-closed lids, he could see the stars whirling in a revolving sky. It was some time before they became motionless again.

He felt a big hand being removed from his chest. When he forced his eyes open, they were cool and refreshed.

"Yin, do you recognize me?" It was the squad leader's voice.

"Squad Leader!" said Yin.

With tears in his eyes, Jen laughed happily. His hand trembled as he took Yin's hand in his. He had been frightened into a cold sweat, but now he was warm again, and he wanted to share his warmth with Yin.

Yin struggled to a sitting position. The squad leader and the medical attendant relieved him of his equipment.

"Rest a while," they said. "We're almost there. We'll go on first. . . ."

"No! I'm all right now!" Yin was already standing. He resumed the march.

From the top of the mountain, they could see a huge panorama. In the distance many mountain peaks stretched fine and small, like a little snake twisting and coiling beneath their feet. Over all hung a thick night mist through which shone tiny specks of flame — lamp light in the windows of far-away houses.

Suddenly, there was the gruff staccato barking of a machine gun. Everyone turned in the direction of the sound. Jen could see Yin's spirit flooding back.

"Give me a handful of rice!" Yin snapped, over his shoulder. He was going to build up his energy and join the battle.

After the days and nights of hardship, the victory for which they had been waiting was about to start. There was no time for a meal that night. Yin took his machine gun and followed the infantry, smashing into the town of Hsiao Dungyu, on the Nanning–Yamchow Road. They triumphantly joined forces with their brothers of the Fourth Field Army.

The enemy all downed their weapons without firing a shot!

Later, the men were standing guard on captured trucks. In the moonlight, the political commissar approached them from the midst of a group of soldiers.

"Have you men eaten yet?" he asked them.

Yin laughed. "We had a good meal in town." Again he laughed at the look of mystification on the commissar's face.

"The prisoners we captured," chuckled Jen, "they were our 'dinner'!"

X

This was the glorious culmination of the five days and five nights. Then, on the eighth of December, they set out after the forces of Pai Chung-hsi which had collapsed and fled from Nanning. After a thirty *li* pursuit, they chased the enemy up a high mountain and sped up after them. Carrying the machine gun, Yin and Jen advanced with a squad of infantrymen. They circled round the face, through a pass on the right, to the rear of the mountain, while the enemy peppered them with fire. Jen was stumbling through the deep grass. He was wheezing for breath, but he continued

feeding ammunition to the machine gun. At times they took cover; at times they rushed forward a few dozen paces. Big Yin and his weapon seemed to be forged into one piece of steel. The smell of gunpowder gave him boundless energy. It was as if he had never known hunger or exhaustion. He kept his eyes glued on the enemy.

Then they stormed to the high point, and the Kuomintang soldiers ran in wild confusion. Yin handed the machine gun to Jen.

"You cover me with this," he ordered. "I'm going to capture some of them." Grasping his hand grenades, he flew after the enemy.

Before long, he herded his prisoners down from the mountain to the highway.

*

The Kwangsi campaign ended victoriously.

Yin was awarded a special citation and was admitted to the Communist Party.

After telling him of the decision, the branch secretary said with a smile, "You certainly turned out fine!"

Yin's face reddened. He spoke shyly, but as though taking his oath,

"This is an honour given me by the Party. At any critical time, I gain strength when I think of the Party. Otherwise of what use would I be?"

LU HSUN: HIS LIFE AND THOUGHT

by FENG HSUEH-FENG

I

Lu Hsun was a great enlightenment thinker of the Chinese people's democratic revolution, one of the great realists of the twentieth century, a great patriot and a great internationalist. His thought and writings developed along exactly the same path as the revolution of the Chinese people. The literary achievements that stand to his credit have a brilliant, unique and undying quality. They reach into the heart of Chinese culture, showing the ideals and noble characteristics of the Chinese people. At the same time they are permeated with penetrating revolutionary thought and an indomitable fighting spirit, which reflect most profoundly the revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people against imperialism and feudalism and which have served that struggle in the most trenchant and practical way.

Lu Hsun is the pen-name of Chou Shu-jen, who was born on September 25, 1881 in Shaohsing, a famous old city of Chekiang. When Lu Hsun was born, his grandfather, a *chinshih* * of the Manchu court, was serving as an official in Peking, but was thrown into prison for some unknown reason when the boy reached his thirteenth year. The family never recovered from the blow. Lu Hsun's father, a scholar who had never taken any official appointment, had always been a poor provider; moreover, he was seized with a serious illness about the time of the imprisonment of the *chinshih* and died after three years of failing health. Because of this, Lu Hsun's family fell into financial distress. His mother, however, was a capable countrywoman of admirable character who had taught herself to read, and her generosity and indomitable character in-

* A degree conferred on those who passed the examination at the imperial court.

fluenced Lu Hsun all through his life. Her maiden name was Lu, and it is from her that Lu Hsun derived his pen-name.

In his boyhood, Lu Hsun was noted among the members of his clan for his extraordinary intelligence. When he was six, he entered the school which his clan maintained for its own members, and began to study Chinese classics. He remained in Shaohsing until he was seventeen, during which period he never left the city except for a short stay in the country with his eldest uncle on the maternal side. According to his own account, other people's reminiscences of him and the materials we have gathered about his life, we have ample proof that Lu Hsun read a great number of Chinese classics during these twelve years. Not only did he have a photographic memory, but he often struck upon a new interpretation of the old text and had the courage to object to the old point of view and the traditional ethics of the feudal, patriarchal society. Meanwhile, apart from the so-called orthodox classics and histories, he showed an extraordinary interest in unofficial histories and collections of prose writings. He searched them out, read them and even copied them with remarkable diligence. In his youth Lu Hsun also took a great interest in tracking down the antiquities of Shaohsing, with reverence and love for the former illustrious scholars of his native prefecture. He was particularly zealous in gathering the writings of those poets, literati and learned men who were distinguished for their patriotism and opposition to tyranny, and the contact thus brought about between him and the great personalities of his native place remained with him as a strong influence throughout his life.

Another factor in Lu Hsun's early life which exercised an important influence on both his character and his literary creation, was that he had a chance to mingle in rural society. He had made friends with the children of honest and plain peasants, — indeed, had formed noble and sincere friendships with them. These contacts were not only remembered by him with pleasure in later life as one of the most charming parts of his existence, but they also formed the important starting point of Lu Hsun's spiritual link with the toiling masses.

Young Lu Hsun also had a lively interest in folk art, such as New Year pictures, tales and legends, joss processions and sacrificial plays. The impression made upon him by the Shaohsing play of Mu-lien was particularly deep. This is a popular dramatic version of a Buddhist parable based upon Mu-lien's rescue of his mother

from hell. It is well-known throughout China, but with varying interpretations and ways of representation in different localities. The Shaohsing version, acted in the dialect, is the richest in folk character and in content, and the most colourful, with an undercurrent of opposition against injustice and tyranny.

Moreover, young Lu Hsun was fond of the fine arts, particularly painting. He not only collected picture albums and illustrated books, but traced the pictures on thin paper whenever he had a moment to spare.

Naturally, the education, occupations and contacts of his early youth laid the foundation for Lu Hsun's later contribution to literature and the revolution. But from the standpoint of the social development of the time, what impelled Lu Hsun in the direction of revolution was the invasion of the country by foreign imperialism and the beginning of the collapse of Chinese feudal society. Since Lu Hsun was born forty years after Opium War of 1840, and thirty years after the Taiping Revolutionary Uprising, in his youth China had already for a long time — starting with the Treaty of Nanking, in 1842 — been fettered by a series of aggressive imperialist treaties and had been reduced to the status of a semi-colony, which was no other than that of a market with an "Open Door".

Lu Hsun's boyhood coincided with the period of intensified imperialist aggression, when the Manchu Dynasty was becoming more and more corrupted and impotent. In a vain effort to prolong its rule, it was appeasing the foreign imperialists by yielding to them its own sovereignty and the territory of the country, while suppressing the patriotic struggle of the people. China had not only been reduced to a semi-colonial status, but was in imminent danger of being partitioned by imperialist powers.

Although the city in which Lu Hsun spent his youth was only remotely touched by outside influences, it could not fail to be shaken by the danger confronting Chinese society, and the entire Chinese nation. The decay of the intellectual-official family into which he was born, coinciding, as it did, with intensified imperialist aggression and the tottering of feudal rule, enabled him all the more easily to recognise the state of society from his own personal experience. His sensitive response to his family environment broadened into a reaction to society and the country as a whole. From the age of thirteen to seventeen, owing to the difficult circumstances of his family and his father's illness, Lu Hsun became familiar with pawn-

shops and pharmacies, and the cold stares that he received in these places left their mark upon him. The shocks that he sustained from his environment had the effect of gradually deepening his thought, with the result that he began to feel the oppression of a feudal, patriarchal society. Aware of its flaws and contradictions, he learned to despise and hate that society. The combination of feudalism with commercial capitalism began to bring forth certain shallow, vulgar and anomalous cultural phenomena, still feudal in essence, which were more or less perceptible even in Shaohsing. Naturally these also were hated by Lu Hsun. His scorn for the people around him increased day by day as he came to consider them a strange species. The feelings of young Lu Hsun were therefore in revolt against Shaohsing. He wanted to leave the place; and he refused to train to be a yamen clerk or business man, these being the occupations generally followed by the literate sons of the decayed families of Shaohsing. That is to say, he insisted on treading a new path, though it was true that financial pressure was already forcing him to leave his family and find other means of livelihood.

Therefore, when Lu Hsun was eighteen, with the eight dollars his mother had managed to raise for his fare, he left for Nanking to take the entrance examination for the Naval Academy run by the Manchu Government. Here foreign science and technique were taught and no tuition fees were charged. He passed the examination, but was not satisfied with the institution. The following year he transferred to the School of Railways and Mines run in connection with the Kiangnan Army Academy (also in Nanking). This place of modern learning, however, did not please him either. But it was at the School of Railways and Mines that Lu Hsun became acquainted with ideas of constitutional reform (bourgeois reform and constitutional monarchy), and he read a number of translations of foreign literature and science, notably Yen Fu's translation of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection.*

Lu Hsun was in Nanking for four years. This was just at the time of Kang Yu-wei's reform programme of 1898, of the anti-imperialist Boxer Uprising with the subsequent invasion of Peking by the eight allied armies in 1900, and of the Treaty of Peking in 1901, when the crisis facing the country was one of life or death. Although the then current ideas of constitutional reform had very little influence on Lu Hsun, as he saw from the very beginning that they were not thorough enough, it was during these four years that

his political consciousness was taking shape in the recognition of the need of a national revolution against imperialism in general, and the Manchu Dynasty in particular. The great influence that he came under at this period was *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection,* which caused him not only to take Darwin's theory of evolution as his compass for many years after, but made him choose the study and promotion of science as the form of his own particular contribution to the national revolution.

In 1901, he graduated from the School of Railways and Mines, and the following year he obtained a government scholarship to study in Japan.

II

Directly he arrived in Japan, Lu Hsun's patriotic ideas became not only more fervent, but more far-reaching and comprehensive. Since the anti-Manchu patriotic movement among the Chinese students in Japan was at its height and Japan was rapidly advancing towards imperialism with all the airs of a bully, the fervour and indignation that Lu Hsun felt at the conditions in his own country made him determined to devote his whole life to the restoration of the power and dignity of his native land. He was becoming just such a warrior of national revolution as was indicated by a sentence written by him in 1903 on a photo of himself which he sent to a friend, "I offer my blood to Hsuan-yuan"*. Nevertheless, he was extremely dissatisfied with the various superficial and ineffectual ideas propounded by the Chinese students in Japan and revolutionary thinkers in China, and in fact with all shallow, ill-conceived and reactionary theories and tendencies. Through his voracious reading in his spare moments of European science, philosophy and literature, and as a result of his eager search for the path to a national revolution, his ideas grew more and more profound, until they attained to what was far beyond the comprehension of the general run of Chinese students abroad or most of the Chinese revolutionary thinkers of the time — the idea of a thorough-going bourgeois democratic revolution. He was helped to this conclusion by the progressive ideas of Darwin's theory of evolution and by the poets he enthusiastically worshipped — Byron, Shelley, Pushkin, Lermontov, Mickiewicz and A. Petöfi.

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* Ancient ancestor of the Chinese people.

The advanced ideas of these world-famed poets, who had advocated patriotic democratic revolution, were of great help to him. He came into contact with their works after he arrived in Japan where he read them in Japanese, or in German, which language he could only manage to understand. His love for their revolutionary and patriotic spirit was one of the factors that made him turn from the medical science that he had formerly decided upon as his lifework, to literature.

After two years of preparatory school, he entered the Medical College of Sendai under the spur of his belief that scientific medicine would aid the revolutionary movement in China. But two years later, his faith was shaken, according to his own account, by a film shown in the classroom. It depicted an incident of the Russo-Japanese War in which the death agonies of a Chinese executed by the Japanese on a charge of spying for the Russians seemed to have aroused no emotion among the witnessing Chinese. The realisation came upon Lu Hsun that to cure the apathy of the Chinese people was more important than to heal their bodies, and no weapon could be more effective in curing and stirring the minds of people than literature; whereupon he gave up his medical studies and turned to literature. It is obvious, however, that he developed in this direction because he was dominated by his desire for a national revolution and by the influence of revolutionary literature as well as the advanced ideas he had culled from European science.

Thus the eight years passed by Lu Hsun as a student in Japan laid an important foundation for his later thought and writings. Among the practical activities of the national revolution, Lu Hsun participated in some of the patriotic student movements of the time, and in 1908 became a member of the anti-Manchu revolutionary political association, the *Kuang-fu Hui*. The reason why he studied the etymology of Chinese characters that same year with the great Chinese scholar, Chang Tai-yen, was his admiration for the latter's unbending revolutionary spirit. Thus, during this period, he ended by accepting thorough-going bourgeois democratic revolutionary ideas; at the same time he began to use literature as a means of promoting the revolutionary patriotic cause. Although the literary magazine that he planned to publish in 1907 never saw the light of day, however, essays, such as the *Power of Poetry*, that he wrote in that same year, together with the translations he made in 1908 from Russian prose writings and those of Eastern and

Northern Europe, formed an extremely important, historically significant beginning to his career.

He returned to China in 1909, two years before the Revolution of 1911, and served in such institutions as the Hangchow Normal School and the Shaohsingfu Middle School as teacher of physiology and chemistry, or as proctor. After the Revolution of 1911, he became principal of the Shaohsing Normal School. In 1912, after the establishment of the provisional government of the Chinese Republic, he accepted the invitation of Tsai Yuan-pei, the Minister of Education, to take up a position in his ministry, which post he retained until 1926.

The years from his return to China to 1918 formed a period of profound, complicated and contradictory meditation and mental groping for Lu Hsun, who had now been brought face to face with the Chinese political and social realities. His mental discomfort arose from the fact that the Revolution of 1911 had not accomplished its historical mission. Disappointed in it, he sank into a condition of doubt and began anew to grope for a solution.

The Revolution of 1911 had merely overthrown the Manchu Dynasty, but imperialism and feudalism remained unshaken. Political power now fell into the hands of war-lords and political adventurers whose groupings the imperialists utilised for their intensified aggressive activities against China. Thus, with each war-lord establishing an independent regime in his own locality, years of confused fighting, and imperialist competition for spheres of influence as its chief features, the semi-feudal, semi-colonial condition of the country became aggravated and chronic. In the sphere of thought, a reactionary back-to-the-old movement was also making itself felt and heard. All this proved that the Revolution of 1911 had failed in its historical mission to be an anti-imperialist, national revolution and an anti-feudal, democratic revolution.

The next factor to be considered is the contradictory state of Lu Hsun's mind at that time. Although he had attained to the revolutionary idea of a thorough-going bourgeois democracy, while rejecting reform measures which compromised with feudalism, yet this was only an ideal to him. He had as yet no clear recognition of how this revolution was to be accomplished, that is, what, power to rely upon, or who was to lead it to success. He doubted the revolutionary spirit and power of the masses, especially the peasant masses, and underestimated them. Thus, although Lu Hsun's

demand for a revolution was thorough-going, he was at sea when it came to the actual handling of that revolution. For, after all, the answer to who was to lead that revolution, and by what power it could be accomplished, came to be clearly recognised only after the Russian October Revolution in 1917, when we came under its influence and were instructed by the expositions of Lenin and Stalin in regard to national revolutions and colonial revolutions, and only after the May Fourth Movement, when the Chinese proletariat entered the political arena as a class power. If there had been no October Revolution changing the face of history, no Marxism-Leninism showing us the way and defining the Chinese revolution, in the form of the New Democratic Revolution, as part of the world revolution of the proletariat, then it would have been difficult for the Chinese revolution to have developed along the correct path. At the time of the Revolution of 1911, the Chinese proletariat had not yet become awakened as an independent class power playing its role in the political arena. The peasants, objectively speaking, should have been the greatest moving force in that revolution. But the then leaders of the revolution were unable to recognise the strength of the peasants, nor did they want to recognise it. Considering the peasant masses as "country bumpkins", they wanted merely to use them for their own purposes. The Revolution of 1911 was directed by the bourgeoisie of that time. Having employed the peasants and absorbed progressive elements among the intellectuals and patriotic petty bourgeois into their ranks, the bourgeoisie were able to overthrow the Manchu Dynasty. But the Chinese bourgeoisie then were even weaker than at a later period, being composed chiefly of "overseas" business men, officials and landed gentry who had been engaged in big business. Some of them were dependent on the foreign capital that had invaded the country although their interests often clashed with those of imperialism; others were capitalist landlords and bureaucrats who had close and firm ties with feudalism. Thus the inherent weakness of this class made it incapable of engaging in a struggle for the principle of the people's rights or for an anti-imperialist national revolution. On the contrary, it made it incline naturally to a compromise with feudalism and imperialism, its highest political ideal being no more than bourgeois reformism. It followed, therefore, that when this class held the reins of the Revolution of 1911, it did not recognise the real power of the masses against

imperialism and feudalism, and especially did not wish to set that force in motion or to organise it. This was the reason why the Revolution of 1911, under such leadership, could only overthrow the Manchu Dynasty, but could not fulfill the historical mission of the revolution. But the historical lesson to be derived from the failure of the Revolution of 1911 — that the feeble bourgeois class of China could not lead the Chinese democratic revolution to victory, was not clearly understood until after the May Fourth Movement when the Chinese proletariat stepped into the political arena, when China had her own Communist Party, and when we had come under the influence of the October Revolution and the theories of Lenin and Stalin on national revolutions and colonial revolutions.

Lu Hsun's disappointment in the Revolution of 1911 was actually disappointment in the bourgeoisie. His attitude towards the revolutionary spirit and power of the peasants was one of doubt. The proletariat at that time had not yet grown into a class power. These were the reasons why he could not have any clear recognition of the path of the Chinese revolution and consequently fell into a disturbed state of mind. This was one of his contradictions.

Both before and after the Revolution of 1911, Lu Hsun and intellectuals like him, who had ideas of a thorough-going democratic revolution, were uncomfortably stuck in a narrow seam even though they were acutely aware of the objective historical need for a democratic revolution and had in various ways taken part in the Revolution of 1911. That is to say, there was a wide gap between their ideals and the actual events of the revolution. Lu Hsun's ideal had no great influence upon the revolutionary movement of that time. But already in 1907, he had sharply criticised the political and ideological representatives of the bourgeoisie who had directed the Revolution of 1911, that is, the revolutionary thinkers and leaders of the time; he had indicated that what they purposed to do was not thorough enough, and he had been at special pains to point out that they were inspired by a feudalistic spirit and selfish greed. Lu Hsun's criticisms had actually drawn blood and had exposed the real spirit animating the bourgeoisie and its representatives. He had shown, in 1907, that these so-called revolutionaries were nothing but charlatans. But all considered, there was only this bourgeois class, only these so-called revolutionaries in great numbers, while revolutionary

intellectuals like Lu Hsun were very few. From the beginning, Lu Hsun turned towards the masses of the people and took early notice of the peasants; but because of the backwardness of the masses in general he advocated the enlightening of their minds as the first step. Through the liberation of their spirit, that is, their individuality, he would remould the national character — that is how he would begin. He believed that only when the people had strong individuality could they rise up in revolution and bring that revolution to victory. (This was an idea he derived from the early thinkers of the bourgeois revolution in Europe; it was also inspired by Darwin). This, according to Lu Hsun, was the path towards revolution; at least it was the duty that he laid upon himself. Of course, the "liberation of individuality" as a means of revolution was confusing the result with the method, and to make it a practical path to revolution was certainly not in accordance with the conditions of Chinese history; but because Lu Hsun had his face turned towards the masses, he believed that the spirit of the Chinese people could and ought to be liberated, and that the work of enlightening them was, after all, one of the duties of a revolutionary. This duty, however, was recognised by very few people and could not obtain the general acclaim of the thinkers of that time. Lu Hsun's proposal and his revolutionary ideal far outstripped the ideas of the bourgeois revolutionaries. Let alone the conservative or charlatan bourgeois revolutionaries, very few even among the radical petty bourgeois intellectuals and real patriots actually entertained far-reaching ideals, or turned towards the people, or were ready to undertake the work of enlightening them. This was another one of his contradictions. The contradiction between his ideal and the reality made him feel particularly lonely and solitary.

Lu Hsun had welcomed the Revolution of 1911 with enthusiasm and had acknowledged its historical achievement of overthrowing the Manchu Dynasty and of doing away with certain systems. But, as stated before, he was soon disillusioned, and through his disappointment he was made to feel acutely the wide disparity between his ideas and what had actually happened. And, as stated above, since he had taken part in the Revolution of 1911 with ideas of a thorough-going democratic revolution, and the historical objective need of the time was for a thorough revolution, that is, for an anti-imperialist, national and an anti-feudal, democratic revolution,

which was not accomplished in 1911, the disparity between Lu Hsun's ideals and the actual revolution also reflected the gap between the historical need for a revolution and the revolution itself as conducted by the bourgeoisie. It reflected problems which could not be recognised or solved by the thinkers of the time. It also reflected contradictions in Lu Hsun's own mind. Neither these contradictions nor the objective problems persisting in this situation were comprehended clearly or solved by Lu Hsun at that time.

Meanwhile his disappointment was intensified and his despondency increased as he saw how, among the intellectuals who had entertained revolutionary ideals and had been full of enthusiasm, many became passive after 1911, or compromised with the old authorities, or even went over entirely to them and became reactionary members of the back-to-the-old movement.

Thus it came about that Lu Hsun's attitude towards politics in the period from the Revolution of 1911 to 1918 was one of sorrow and discouragement. He was groping around unhappily in his mind, while his feelings were a troubled pattern of hope interwoven with despair. According to his writings and his own recollections afterwards, the problems that engaged him at this period were those regarding the path of the Chinese revolution (i.e. the moving force of the revolution and its leadership). With this as the centre, he continued to examine silently into society and the thoughts of the people, to dig into, and to dissect Chinese history and traditional culture.

The whole of this period was passed by Lu Hsun in Peking, except for two visits to his mother in Shaohsing, where his observation of the countryside drawing towards the verge of ruin made a profound impression upon him.

During this period he was earning his own living, supporting his family through his appointment at the Ministry of Education, while at the same time he was engaged in extremely valuable work of Chinese scholarship, — the textual criticism and compilation of classics, research into the rubbings from old bronzes and stone tablets, etc. The revision of the collected writings of Hsi Kang, a great poet of the Wei Dynasty, was accomplished at this period. Although living in a feudal era, Hsi Kang dared to oppose tyrannical government and the Confucian dogma of ritual, thus becoming a patriotic poet whose ideas and attitude reflected the spirit of the people to a certain degree.

Lu Hsun was also, during this period, engaged in studying the Buddhist classics that had been translated from Indian since the Six Dynasties (420 — 589 A.D.).

His loneliness and mental groping lasted until 1918 when a change began to take place. This was nothing less than the beginning of his brilliant revolutionary struggle.

III

The change in Lu Hsun took place on the eve of the May Fourth Movement which is the line of demarcation running through the Chinese democratic revolutionary movement, dividing the old from the new. Succeeding the Revolution of 1911, a high tide of revolution was approaching. Owing to the first world war, the imperialist powers of Europe and America were busily absorbed with their own affairs and therefore had slackened, for the time being, their oppression and control of China. This allowed the national capitalism of China a certain amount of development, which also resulted in the growth of the proletariat. On the other hand, the influence of the October Revolution of 1917 was bringing on a new tide of revolution which, through the participation and under the leadership of revolutionary intellectuals (the chief force coming from the students, and young revolutionaries represented by Comrade Mao Tse-tung and others) was moving towards a thoroughly anti-imperialist, anti-feudal revolutionary struggle. This struggle came to a head in the May Fourth Movement of 1919. The bourgeoisie participated in the May Fourth Movement and showed themselves fairly enthusiastic, for, by that time, they had already changed somewhat in character and developed in number. National capital having met with a chance to raise its head, even if only temporarily and only to a certain degree, the intellectuals representing the capitalist class were quite active in the May Fourth Movement. But the chief characteristic of the May Fourth Movement is that the actual leadership was not in the hands of the bourgeoisie, i.e. the intellectuals representing that class, but in the hands of the revolutionary intellectuals and youths (such as Comrade Li Ta-tsao and Comrade Mao Tse-tung) who, representing the worker-peasant masses, had come under the influence of the October Revolution and accepted the theories of Marxism-Leninism. Petty bourgeois revolutionary intellectuals (Lu Hsun was one of them) showed themselves, at the time, more positive and thorough than the intellctuals who represented the capitalist class. It was

LI CHI & FUNG CHEN: A Historic Meeting

LI CHI & FUNG CHEN: A Historic Meeting

only later that some of these petty bourgeois intellectuals turned to the right and some became negative, while the majority advanced towards Marxism-Leninism. Another characteristic of the May Fourth Movement is that it was far-reaching in its scope. Although the proletariat took no active part in it, their political ideas were reflected objectively in history through the struggle of the communist intellectuals who were also being drawn into their ranks. Thus, in 1921, the Communist Party of China was founded, through which an awakened class entered into the political arena.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung has said, "The outstanding historical meaning of the May Fourth Movement lies in its having a complexion still lacking in the Revolution of 1911, in its being completely and uncompromisingly against imperialism and completely and uncompromisingly against feudalism." *(On New Democracy)*. And with regard to the May Fourth Movement as a movement for the new culture, Comrade Mao Tse-tung has said, "The cultural revolution of the May Fourth Movement was a movement thoroughly opposed to feudalistic culture. Since the beginning of Chinese history there has never been such a great and thorough cultural revolution. With 'oppose the old morality and promote the new morality' and 'oppose the old literature and promote the new literature' as its two big banners, it achieved a great success." (ibid). In referring to it as a cultural revolution thoroughly opposed to the then existing feudalistic culture, Comrade Mao Tse-tung has included the idea that the May Fourth Cultural Movement was anti-imperialistic.

In April 1918, Lu Hsun, under the pen-name that has become so famous, published his first short story, *A Madman's Diary*, written in the vernacular, in *New Youth* (This was a magazine which guided the cultural revolution and the political ideas of democratic revolution. It was also a pioneer in introducing the ideas of the October Revolution and Marxism-Leninism. Li Ta-tsao was on the editorial staff and one of its important leaders). This story was a fierce attack against the Chinese feudal family system and the old ritualistic Confucian dogma. Both in content and literary form, it was the first bugle call of the cultural revolution which was no other than a revolution in ideology. Directly it was published, it was generally recognised as the first creative work of the new literature of China.

At this time, Lu Hsun also began to write, with an exceedingly sharp and penetrating pen, ingenious, intransigent critical essays

aimed at social problems. These were short pieces of political argument permeated with poetic strains, which he himself afterwards called "stray thoughts" and "diverse essays". They were as sharp as a dagger and able also to express thought that was both profound and wide in its scope. Lu Hsun afterwards developed this literary form by completing a whole series of unique prose masterpieces of an ideological and political nature. They occupy the most important position in his literary career, higher than his stories.

From then on, Lu Hsun used his short stories to dissect Chinese society and to reflect situations such as the village becoming bankrupt under the heel of feudalism. They also reflect Lu Hsun's painful feelings at the memory of the failure of the Revolution of 1911 and hint at the lessons to be derived from it, while his deepest sympathy went to the peasant population that had fallen into distress with no one to whom they could confide their sorrows. At the same time, although he still doubted the revolutionary character and power of the peasant masses, he was nevertheless at pains to discover a revolutionary force among the peasants and entertained extremely fervent hopes of their awakening. In 1923, the publication of his first volume of collected short stories, *Na Han (Cries)*, which included such immortal works as *My Native Village* and *The True Story of Ah Q*, established Lu Hsun's position in China as the father of the new literature and of realism.

Through their display of constructive power, the creative stories of Lu Hsun laid a basis for victory in the literary revolution. But the chief weapon used by Lu Hsun consisted of those critical essays which he himself called "stray thoughts". Through them he let his dagger fall on all advocates and practitioners of feudalism, on all "restorationists", on all backsteppers, on all who flirted with the enemy, and on all who undermined or harmed the revolution — in a word, on all enemies of the people and of the revolution. His attack was so fierce and potent that the enemies were dispersed and sent flying in whatever direction he turned; none escaped with a whole skin. Also, out of the vastness of his scholarship and his profound knowledge of Chinese history and society, that same history and society and all out-of-date modes of thought were dissected in his prose writings. Through his unique and extraordinarily deep observation and understanding he kept enlightening and warning the youth and the revolutionary cultural

circles, thus making them not only penetrate further into the problems before them, but also obtain from him a great deal of experience and instruction on the tactics and strategy of the ideological revolution, as typified by his repeated reminders of "look reality in the face", "a tough struggle", "no quarter to the enemy", "don't spare him because he's down", etc.

Apart from waging war with his pen, Lu Hsun also kept in close touch with the youth of this period. From 1920, he was a lecturer at Peking University and the National Teachers College. He edited a supplement to a daily paper, and helped and directed young writers to establish several literary organisations. He was busy reading the papers of young writers which he revised with great care; and he was visited by many young people and with many he also corresponded. In 1925, he supported with great zeal the opposition of the students of the Peking Normal University for Women (where he was concurrently a lecturer) to Chang Shih-tsao, the Minister of Education, who had illegally dissolved the University. In 1926, at the time of Tuan Chi-jui's March 18th massacre of the students, Lu Hsun assisted the students in practical ways, in addition to writing articles to support their cause. Owing to his ideological struggle and the actual guidance and help he afforded to young people, he was one of the personalities most beloved by them in Peking, during the years 1924 to 1926. Apart from Li Ta-tsao, his was the real authority in the ideological sphere.

In August 1926 he was forced to leave Peking by the reactionary warlord government; that was the time when a high tide of revolution was sweeping over South China. And it was also in this year that his second collection of short stories, *Pang Huang (Hesitation)* was published. From 1918 until then was the first prolific period in which his creative energy burned the most brightly. The second was from 1927 to his death in 1936, the period during which he was in Shanghai. Prior to leaving Peking, he had written, in addition to his short stories, four volumes of collected essays, one volume of prose poems, a *Short History of the Chinese Novel*, etc. Furthermore, in his translations, which amounted to a greater number of words than his original writings, he had introduced to the reading public the literary theories of the Soviet Union and Blok's *Twelve*.

Lu Hsun's outlook on the world, during this period in Peking, was still based on the theory of evolution. According to his own admission, he merely believed that humanity and society are bound to progress, and that the new is bound to replace the old. His struggle, therefore, took the form of hastening the extinction of the old in order to promote the growth of the new; but as to what the new was actually going to be, he would have been at a loss to tell. He had not yet accepted positively and clearly the theories of Marx and Lenin. Regarding the problems of the Chinese democratic revolution, which by this time had already entered the epoch of New Democracy under the leadership of the proletariat, he did not comprehend them, as a Communist would, from the proletarian standpoint, utilising Marxism-Leninism. But he was close to the Marxist-Leninists, and was fiercely attacking the right wing of the bourgeoisie. Moreover, although still retaining the idea of the liberation of individuality, he had nevertheless, in his work of exposing and attacking the dark forces of society that were oppressing the masses of the people, already far surpassed his former dissection of the roots of illness in the "national character"; or, to be more exact, Lu Hsun had now in a general way diagnosed the feudal structure of Chinese society and the accompanying feudal ideas which, layer upon layer, were oppressing the masses, as being the primary source of disease in the "national character". Lu Hsun had attained to his outlook through his prolonged intense thought before the May Fourth Movement, and through his enthusiastic struggle during that movement. This outlook was one of the bases which enabled him to advance, step by step, from his former theory of the liberation of individuality (reform of the "national character") to the theory of the liberation of the worker-peasant masses in his later period. Thus, Lu Hsun in his Peking perioid had not yet acquired the proletarian standpoint and the Marxist-Leninist outlook, but because he was the mortal enemy of feudalism, because all his struggles were absolutely thorough and were those demanded by the New Democracy, and moreover, because he reflected the determined, uncompromising and fearless spirit of revolution, he finally became an enlightener and spearhead of the New Democratic revolution.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung, in appraising the May Fourth cultural revolution, has said, "The overwhelming greatness of its force and the overwhelming fierceness of its strength were invincible. The

vastness of its mobilisation surpassed that of any other historical period in China. And Lu Hsun was the greatest and most heroic standard-bearer of this new cultural army. Lu Hsun was the chief general of the Chinese cultural revolution. He was not only a great writer, but a great thinker and a great revolutionary. He was a man of the strongest backbone. There was not an atom of slavish complexion or disposition in him. This is the kind of character most worthy of being treasured by the people of colonial and semi-colonial countries. Lu Hsun represented by far the great majority of the whole of our nation on the cultural front. Without precedent, he was the most correct, courageous, determined, loyal and eager national hero, who plunged headlong into the attack against the enemy. The direction in which Lu Hsun advanced is the direction of the new culture of the Chinese nation." (*On New Democracy*). It is understood, of course, that Comrade Mao Tse-tung here includes, and is paying special attention to, Lu Hsun's later period of ten years' most difficult struggle in Shanghai.

IV

In August 1926, Lu Hsun left Peking for Amoy where he accepted the professorship of literature at Amoy University; he resigned, however, in December of that year. In January 1927, he went to Canton where he became Dean and concurrently Head of the Chinese Language and Literature Department of Sun Yat-sen University. In April of that year, when Chiang Kai-shek betrayed the revolution and arrested and murdered members of the Communist Party and the masses of the revolution on a large scale, some of the students of Sun Yat-sen University were also seized and executed. When Lu Hsun's efforts on their behalf failed, he resigned in anger. After his resignation, Lu Hsun himself was in danger in Canton; therefore, in October, he left for Shanghai. From this time on he resided in Shanghai until his death; neither did he resume teaching nor adopt any other profession, reserving all his energies for literary work and the literary movement. Thus he began the great and heroic struggle of his later period.

In 1928, he founded the magazine *Pen-liu (The Torrent)* and began to study the social science of Marxism-Leninism, translating the literary theories of Marxism-Leninism. At the same time, he began to draw close to the Communist Party, taking part in the mass movements promoted by it. For instance, in 1928 he became

a member of the Revolutionary Mutual Aid Society; in 1930, he was one of the promoters of the China Freedom League. When the China League of Left-Wing Writers was founded in Shanghai in March 1930, a historic event in the Chinese revolutionary literary movement, Lu Hsun was one of its founders and its chief leader until it was reorganised, in 1936, owing to changed conditions. Further, in January 1933, he joined the League of Defense of the People's Rights; and in May, he went to the German consulate in Shanghai and personally handed in a protest against the brutalities of the fascists. In September, the French comrade, Vaillant-Couturier, and a few others came to Shanghai for the purpose of attending an anti-imperialist, anti-fascist conference, which, owing to the White Terror, had to be held in the strictest secrecy. Madame Sun attended this conference as delegate for China. Although Lu Hsun was not present at the meeting, he had helped with the organisation of the conference and was one of the honorary chairmen. These were the most prominent political struggles in which he took part in addition to his litierary struggle.

During these last ten years of his life, Lu Hsun's literary output also surpassed that of his former period. He wrote nine volumes of prose whose sharpness was not inferior to that of his first period, while they far surpassed his first period in mental depth and breadth, and in the profundity of literary style. He also completed a volume of short stories on historical subjects, and his translations were far greater in bulk than in his first period. Among them, the most important are: *The Theory of Art* by Plechanov and *The Theory of Art, Literature and Criticism* by Lunacharsky; Fadeyev's novel, *Annihilation; October* by H. Yakovlev; two volumes of short stories by Furmanov and others; Gorki's *Russian Fairy Tales*, and Gogol's *Dead Souls*. He also introduced to the Chinese reading public Serafimovitch's *Iron Stream*, Gladkov's *Cement*, Sholokhov's *Quiet Flows the Don*, and Ivanov's *Armoured Train*.

It was also during these ten years that Lu Hsun introduced Soviet woodcuts to the Chinese public, and those of the German artist, Käthe Kollwitz, while he promoted and directed the new Chinese revolutionary woodcut movement.

A third of Lu Hsun's time, during these ten years, was taken up with directing, and taking part in, the editorial work of various magazines, in reading, revising and correcting the manuscripts

written by young people and in keeping up correspondence with them, all of which activities far outnumbered those of his first period. He hardly had any time to rest. For instance, even during his last illness, in 1936, he was still spending every ounce of energy in reading the manuscripts of young writers and writing prefaces for them, in addition to which he meticulously edited, revised and published posthumously the writings and translations of Comrade Chü Chiu-pai.

These ten years, moreover, were the years of the bloody rule of the insane White Terror, with the Kuomintang trying to "surround and exterminate" the revolutionaries. Lu Hsun's social relations were limited to a few young people and one or two Communists whom he met in complete or partial secrecy, under extreme difficulty. He was obliged to live apart from the masses and was in danger of arrest or assassination at any moment. Nevertheless, he persisted in his unbending and unrelenting struggle and in his leadership of the cultural movement. Not only did he support the revolutionary cultural front, never yielding a single step, but he broke up the ten year Kuomintang "surround and exterminate" campaign against the revolutionary cultural movement. As Comrade Mao Tse-tung has said, "It was during this 'surround and exterminate' campaign that Lu Hsun, an advocate of Communism, became a great figure of the Chinese cultural revolution."

The last articles to come from Lu Hsun's pen were published during his illness in July and August, 1936, and consisted of an open letter exposing the schemes of the Chinese Trotskyites to undermine the Chinese Communist policy of a national united front against Japan, and an article accepting the policy of the Chinese Communist Party and arguing in its favour.

Owing to overwork and the ravages of tuberculosis, Lu Hsun, a "great figure of the cultural revolution", died on October 19, 1936, in Shanghai.

Lu Hsun's contribution to the people during the last ten years of his life was in truth as great as evaluated by Chairman Mao. The key to his success was the firmness of his faith. From the time he recognised the revolutionary force of the worker and peasant classes and stood firmly with the proletariat, accepting the whole truth of Marxism-Leninism, he never doubted the inevitable victory of the Chinese revolution. In his struggle for the Chinese

people's revolution, for the Communist ideals of humanity, he spent all his strength, keeping nothing back, never being negligent for a single day.

The evolution of his struggle and thought throughout his life was along the path of the Chinese revolution so that he could fulfill the historical mission he had undertaken — that of revolutionary enlightenment. He was without doubt a great and brilliant thinker in the field of revolutionary enlightenment. Especially during the last ten years of his life, using the ideological weapon of Marxism-Leninism, he took upon himself the duties of a rank and file soldier of the worker-peasant masses, sweeping away the obstacles blocking the progress of the revolutionary ideology and culture of the worker-peasant masses. Thus, his courageous attitude and the power of his thought far surpassed those of his first period.

The fighting character of Lu Hsun's thought and its immortal historical quality were due to his ideas being focused from beginning to end on the progressive demands of the Chinese people and on the path of the revolution. They were due to his groping and developing in the direction of the victory of the people's revolution and to his union in blood with the people on the hard, tortuous and victorious path of revolution. The development of Lu Hsun's ideas throughout his life, and the final conclusion to which it led, serves well to demonstrate the inevitable victory of the Chinese people's revolution, of Marxism-Leninism in China, and above all, of Mao Tse-tung's teachings.

Lu Hsun in the period when he based his ideas on the theory of evolution was a progressive materialist. The basis and value of his materialist thought lay in its reflecting the revolutionary reality of the time and in its progressive quality being put to the service of revolutionary reality in the struggle for the progress of the people. But the leap from the theory of evolution to Marxism, from the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie to the proletariat, from ordinary progressive materialism to revolutionary historical dialectic materialism meant an essential development in Lu Hsun's thought. Only historical dialectic materialism has revolutionary character to the fullest extent. It alone is able to give an absolutely undistorted reflection of revolutionary reality, and it alone is completely effective in the service of revolution. Therefore, it was this essential development that enabled Lu Hsun to accomplish his great fighting mission, that gave immortal historical value to his ideas and made him a "great figure of the cultural revolution".

Because Lu Hsun's ideas never deviated from the actual struggle of the revolution — he always thought in terms of actual struggles, his ideology not only reflected the way in which the Chinese revolution developed, but was also rich in the fighting experiences of, and in the lessons learned from, the revolutionary reality. Lu Hsun himself was one who was able to accept the lessons to be learned from the blood sacrifice of the people. For instance, his becoming a Marxist-Leninist in his later period, a supremely active warrior fighting under the banner of the Chinese Communist Party, was the result of his accepting the lessons to be learned from actual events. Thus, his development into a Marxist-Leninist was not only a reflection of the historical significance of the betrayal of revolution by the Kuomintang in 1927, a reflection of the historical truth that only under the leadership of the proletariat and the Communist Party could the Chinese revolution be victorious, it was also a development united in flesh and blood with the actual struggle of the revolution. This union enriched the content and the realistic quality of his thought. The experiences and lessons that he noted down therefore have had, over a long period, realistic significance and value.

Since his link with the revolution was one of flesh and blood, his thought also reflected the great ideals of the Chinese people and a great and excellent aspect of their culture — its mass and folk character. In addition to this, the brilliance of Marxism-Leninism filled his thought with clear and luminous idealism to the highest degree. Because his thought richly reflected the ideas, wisdom and qualities of the Chinese people and the essence of Chinese culture, and was a crystallisation of the revolutionary will and struggle of the Chinese people, his works will undoubtedly become classics reflecting the fighting spirit of the Chinese people and their ideals of life.

He gave everything to the struggle for Chinese culture and for the Chinese people's victorious future of Communism after the transitional stage of New Democracy. He personally worked for Mao Tse-tung's cause, and he died at his post; he was indeed a true patriot. At the same time, he was a faithful friend of the socialist Soviet Union and of all the progressive people of the world, a true internationalist.

His literary works, such as his short stories, do not amount to much in bulk, but their quality has enabled them to lay a firm foundation for Chinese realism and has made Lu Hsun one of the

world's great realists in the twentieth century. Lu Hsun's realism is a realism particular to the Chinese people. If, however, it is compared with the literature of other countries, it comes closest to Russian realism. This is because there were certain similarities between Chinese society in Lu Hsun's day and Russian society before the October Revolution, and also, according to Lu Hsun's own statement, because he had come under the influence of the literature of Russia and that of Eastern and Northern Europe.

Lu Hsun's political writings in which he attacks his enemies and expresses his own ideas, that is, his "diverse essays", are more important, both in regard to his own development and for the Chinese people, than his short stories. The sixteen volumes of his collected articles form the chief record of his thought and, at the same time, are his major weapon for attacking his enemies. In them we can find his deep hatred and blazing anger against the enemies of the people; in them are the hopes of the people and the splendour of their victory. They are an inexhaustible store of valuable and profound ideas on Chinese history, Chinese society and the Chinese revolution, and may be regarded as a treasure-house of the wisdom of the Chinese people of the present day. The artistic quality and style of his works place Lu Hsun in the ranks of the few great prose writers of the world.

In his writings on the history of literature, Lu Hsun gave proof of broad scholarship and original views. Besides this, he was indefatigable in introducing foreign literature to the Chinese public, especially Russian and Soviet literature, with the result that his translations are greater in volume than his original works.

The True Story of Ah Q

by LU HSUN (1881-1936)

Chapter I

Introduction

I have been wanting to write Ah Q's true story for several years. But all the time that I wanted to write I would keep vacillating, showing quite clearly that I am not one of those who achieve glory by writing; for an immortal pen has always been required to record the deeds of an immortal man, by this means the man becoming known to posterity through the writing and the writing known to posterity through the man — until finally it becomes impossible to tell which depends most on the other to be known to fame. But in the end I always came back to the idea of writing the story of Ah Q, as if there were a devil goading me on to do so.

And yet when I had decided to write this soon-to-be-forgotten story, no sooner had I taken up my pen than I became conscious of insurmountable difficulties. The first was the question of what to call the work. Confucius said, "If the name is not correct, the words will not ring true"; and this axiom should be most carefully observed. There are many types of biographies: official biographies, autobiographies, authenticated biographies, unauthorised biographies, supplementary biographies, family histories, sketches . . . but unfortunately none of these suited my purpose. "Official biography"? This account will obviously not be included with those of many eminent people in some authentic history. "Autobiography"? But I am obviously not Ah Q. If I were to call this "unauthorised biography", then where is his "authenticated biography"? The use

of "mythological record" is impossible, because Ah Q was no supernatural being. "Supplementary biography"? But no President has ever ordered the National Historical Institute to write a "standard life" of Ah Q. It is true that although there are no "lives of gamblers" in authentic English history, the famous author Dickens nevertheless wrote "Rodney Stone"; but while this is permissible for a famous author it is not permissible for poor writers like myself. Then there is "family history"; but I do not know whether I belong to the same family as Ah Q or not, nor have I ever been entrusted with such a task by his children or grandchildren. If I were to use "sketch", it might be objected that Ah Q has no "complete account". In short, this is really a "life", but since I write in a vulgar style using the language of porters and peddlers, I dare not presume to give it so high-sounding a title; so from the stock phrase of the less reputable novelists "After this digression let us return to the *true story*" I will take the last two words as my title; and if this is reminiscent of the "*True Story* of Calligraphy" of the ancients, it cannot be helped.

In the second place, after having decided on the type of biography the opening sentences should read something like this: "So and So, whose other name was so and so, was a native of such and such a place"; but I am not sure what Ah Q's surname was. On one occasion he seemed to have the surname Chao, but the next day there was some confusion about the matter again. This was when Mr. Chao's son had passed the county official examination, and resounding gongs were announcing his success to the village; Ah Q had just drunk two bowls of yellow wine, and he said with a swagger that this reflected credit on him too, since he belonged to the same clan as Mr. Chao, and by an exact reckoning he was three generations senior to the successful candidate. At the time several of his listeners even began to stand slightly in awe of him. But who could tell that the next day the bailiff would summon Ah Q to Mr. Chao's house, where no sooner did the old gentleman set eyes on him than his face turned red with fury and he roared:

"Ah Q, you miserable wretch! Did you say I belonged to the same clan as you?"

Ah Q made no reply.

The longer Mr. Chao looked at him the angrier he became, and advancing menacingly a few steps he said," How dare you talk such

nonsense! How could I have such a relative as you? Is your surname Chao?"

Ah Q made no reply, his idea being to retreat; but Mr. Chao darted forward and gave him a slap on the face.

"How could your name be Chao! — Do you think you are worthy of the name Chao!"

Ah Q made no attempt to defend his right to the name Chao, but rubbing his left cheek he went out with the bailiff; and outside, after a torrent of abuse from the bailiff he thanked the latter by giving him a gratuity of two hundred cash. All who knew of this said Ah Q was really a great fool to ask for a beating like that; his surname probably was not Chao, but even if it were he should have known better than to boast like that since there was a Mr. Chao living there. After this no further mention was made of Ah Q's ancestry, so that I still do not know what his surname really was.

In the third place, I do not know either how Ah Q's personal name should be written. During his lifetime everybody called him Ah Quei, but after his death not a soul mentioned Ah Quei again; for how could he be one of those whose name is "preserved on bamboo tablets and silk"; or if it is a question of preserving his name, this essay must be the first attempt at doing so, and thus I am confronted with this difficulty at the outset. I gave the question careful thought: Ah Quei — would that be the "kuei" meaning cassia or the "guei" meaning nobility? If his other name had been Moon Pavilion, or if he had celebrated his birthday in the month of the Moon Festival, then it would certainly be the *kuei* for cassia *. But since he had no other name — or if he had, no one knew it, — and since he never sent out invitations on his birthday to secure complimentary verses: to write Ah Kuei (cassia) would be too arbitrary. Again, if he had had an elder or younger brother called Ah Fu (prosperity), then he would certainly be called Ah Guei (nobility); but again, he was all by himself: thus to write Ah Guei (nobility) would also be making an assumption which could not be corroborated. All other unusual characters with the sound Quei are even less suitable. I once put this question to Mr. Chao's son, the successful county candidate, but even such a learned man as he was baffled by it.

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* The cassia blooms in the month of the Moon Festival. Also, according to Chinese folklore, it is believed that the shadow on the moon is that of a cassia tree.

According to him, however, because Chen Tu-hsiu had brought out the magazine "New Youth", advocating the use of the Western alphabet, the national culture was going to the dogs, and therefore this could not be traced. As a last resort I asked someone from my district to go and look up the legal documents recording Ah Q's guilt, but after eight months he sent me a letter saying that there was no name anything like Ah Quei in those records. Although I was not sure whether this was the truth or not, or whether he had done nothing about it, still, after failing to trace the name this way I had no other means of finding it. Since I am afraid the new system of Mandarin phonetics has not yet come into common use, there is nothing for it but to use the Western alphabet, writing the name according to English spelling as Ah Quei and abbreviating it to Ah Q. This approximates to following the New Youth magazine blindly, and I am thoroughly ashamed of myself, but since a learned man could not give me the solution to my problem, what else can I do?

In the fourth place, there is the question of Ah Q's place of origin. Assuming his surname to be Chao, then according to the old custom which still prevails of classifying people by their districts, one might look up the commentary to the book *Different Surnames* and find "A native of Tien Shui in Kansu province", but unfortunately Ah Q's surname is not definitely known, with the result that his place of origin must also remain uncertain. Although he lived for the most part in Weichuang, he often stayed in other places, so that it would be wrong to call him a native of Weichuang; to call him a native of Weichuang would be a breach of historical canons.

What I console myself with is the fact that the character "Ah" is absolutely correct. It is definitely not the result of false analogy, and is well able to stand the test of scholarly criticism. As for the other problems, they are not such as unlearned people like myself can solve, and I only hope that historians and antiquaries like the followers of Hu Shih may be able in future to throw new light on them; however I am afraid that by that time my *True Story of Ah Q* will already have passed into oblivion.

The foregoing can be considered as an introduction.

Chapter II

A Brief Account of Ah Q's Victories

Not only is there some uncertainty regarding Ah Q's surname, personal name and place of origin, but there is even some uncertainty regarding his "background". The reason for this is that the people of Weichuang only made use of his services or treated him as a laughing-stock, without ever paying the slightest attention to his "background". Ah Q himself said nothing on the subject, only when he was quarrelling with people he might glance at them and say, "We used to be much better off than you! What do you think you are?"

Ah Q had no family but lived in the Tutelary God's Temple at Weichuang. He had no fixed employment either, simply doing odd jobs for others: if there were wheat to be cut he would cut it, if there were rice to be ground he would grind it, if there were a boat to be punted he would punt it. Should the work last for a considerable period he might stay in the house of his temporary employer, but as soon as it was finished he would leave. Thus whenever people had work to be done they would remember Ah Q, but what they remembered was his service and not his "background"; and by the time the job was done even Ah Q himself would be forgotten, to say nothing of his "background". Once indeed an old man praised him saying, "What a good worker Ah Q is!" At that time Ah Q, bare-armed, listless and lean, was standing before him, and other people did not know whether the remark was made seriously or derisively, but Ah Q was overjoyed.

Ah Q, again, had a very high opinion of himself; he looked down on all the inhabitants of Weichuang, thinking even the two young "scholars" not worth a smile, though most young scholars were likely to pass the official examinations, so to speak. Mr. Chao and Mr. Chen were held in great respect by the villagers, for not only were they rich, but they were both the fathers of young scholars, and Ah Q alone showed no sign of exceptional deference toward them, thinking to himself, "My sons may be much greater!"

Moreover after Ah Q had been to the town several times, he naturally became even more conceited, although at the same time he looked down greatly on the townspeople. For instance, a bench made of a wooden plank three feet by three inches the Weichuang

villagers called a "long bench" and he called it a "long bench" too, but the townspeople called it a "straight bench", and he thought, "This is wrong; how ridiculous!" Again, when they fried large headed fish in oil the Weichuang villagers all added scallion leaves sliced half an inch long, whereas the townspeople added finely shredded scallions and he thought again, "This is wrong too; how ridiculous! But the Weichuang villagers are really ignorant rustics who have never seen the fried fish of the town!"

Ah Q who "used to be much better off", who was a man of the world and "a good worker", would almost have been the perfect man had it not been for a few unfortunate physical blemishes. The most annoying consisted of some places on his scalp where in the past, at some uncertain date, shiny ringworm scars had appeared. Although these were on his own head, apparently Ah Q did not consider them as altogether honourable, for he refrained from using the word "ringworm" or any words of similar pronunciation, and later he improved on this, making "bright" and "light" forbidden words and later still even "lamp" and "candle" were prohibited. Whenever the prohibition was disregarded, no matter whether intentionally or not, Ah Q would burst into a rage, his ringworm scars turning scarlet; he would look over the offender, and if it were someone weak in repartee he would curse him, while if it were a poor fighter he would hit him. And yet, curiously enough, it was usually Ah Q who came off worse in these encounters, with the result that he adopted a new strategy, usually contenting himself with a furious glare.

But it came about that after Ah Q had taken to using this furious glare, the idlers in Weichuang grew even more fond of making jokes at his expense. As soon as they saw him they would pretend to give a start, and say:

"Phew, it's lighting up."

Ah Q would become angry, as was his habit, and glare furiously.

"So there is a kerosene lamp here," they would continue, not in the least intimidated.

Ah Q could do nothing, but rack his brains for some retort: "You don't even deserve . . . . " At this juncture it seemed as if the scars on his scalp were something noble and honourable, and not just ordinary ringworm scars. However, as we said above, Ah Q was a man of the world, he knew at once that he had nearly broken the "taboo" and so refrained from saying any more.

If the idlers were still not satisfied, but continued to tease him, in the end they would come to blows. Then only after Ah Q, to all appearances, had been defeated, had had his brownish pigtail pulled and his head bumped against the wall four or five times, would the idlers walk away, satisfied at having won the victory. Ah Q would stand there for a second, thinking to himself, "It is as if I were beaten by my son. What is the world coming to nowadays. . . ." Thereupon he too would walk away, satisfied at having won the victory.

Whatever Ah Q thought to himself he was sure to tell people later, thus almost all who made fun of Ah Q knew that he had this means of winning a psychological victory, so after this anyone who pulled or twisted his brown pigtail would forestall him: "Ah Q, this is not a son beating his father, it is a man beating a beast. You say yourself: A man beating a beast!"

Then Ah Q, clutching at the root of his pigtail, his head on one side, would say: "Beating an insect — how about that? I am an insect — now will you let me go?"

However, although he was an insect the idlers would not let him go until they had knocked his head four or five times against something nearby, according to their custom, after which they would walk away satisfied that they had won the victory, confident that this time Ah Q was done for. But in less than ten seconds, Ah Q would walk away also satisfied that he had won the victory, thinking that he was the "foremost self-belittler", and that after subtracting "self-belittler" what remained was "foremost". Was not the highest successful candidate in the official examination also the "foremost"? "And what do you think you are?" he would say.

After employing a few such cunning devices to get even with his enemies, Ah Q would hurry happily to the wineshop to drink a few bowls of wine, joke with the others again, row with them again, come off victorious again, and return happily to the Tutelary God's Temple, there to fall asleep as soon as he lay down. If he had money he would go to gamble. There would be a group of men squatting on the ground, Ah Q sandwiched in the midst, his face streaming with perspiration; and his voice would be the loudest to shout: "Four hundred on the Green Dragon!"

"Hey — open there!" the stakeholder, his face streaming with perspiration too, would open the box and chant: "Heavenly

Gate! . . . Nothing for the Corner! . . . Popularity and the Passage have no stakes on them. Pass over Ah Q's coppers!"

"The Passage — one hundred — one hundred and fifty."

To the tune of this chanting, Ah Q's money would gradually vanish into the pockets of other people whose faces were streaming with perspiration. Finally he would be forced to squeeze his way out of the crowd and stand at the back watching, taking a vicarious interest in the game until it broke up, when he would go back reluctantly to the Tutelary God's temple. And the next day he would go to work with swollen eyes.

However, the truth of the proverb "Misfortune may be a blessing in disguise" was shown when Ah Q was unfortunate enough to win and almost suffered defeat in the end.

This was the evening of the Festival of the Gods in Weichuang. According to custom there was a play; and close to the stage, also according to custom, were numerous gambling tables. The drums and gongs of the play sounded about three miles away to Ah Q who had ears only for the stakeholder's chant. He staked successfully again and again, his coppers turning into silver coins, his silver coins into dollars, and his dollars mounting up. In his excitement he cried out, "Two dollars on Heavenly Gate!"

He never knew who started the fighting, nor for what reason. The sound of curses, blows and footsteps made a confused medley in his head, and by the time he clambered to his feet the gambling tables had vanished and so had the gamblers. Several parts of his body seemed to be aching as if he had been kicked and knocked about, while a number of people were looking at him in astonishment. Feeling as if there were something amiss, he walked back to the Tutelary God's Temple, and when he regained his composure he realised that his pile of dollars had disappeared. Since most of the people who ran the gambling tables at the Festival were not natives of Weichuang, where could he look for the culprits?

So white and glittering a pile of silver! It had all been his . . . but now it had disappeared. To consider it as equivalent to being robbed by one's son still could not comfort him; to consider himself as an insect could not comfort him either: so this time he really felt something of the bitterness of defeat.

But presently he changed defeat into victory. Raising his right hand he slapped his own face hard twice, so that it tingled

with pain. After this slapping his heart felt lighter, for it seemed as if the one who had given the slap was himself, the one slapped some other self, and soon it was just as if he had beaten someone else — in spite of the fact that his face was still tingling. He lay down satisfied that he had gained the victory.

Soon he was asleep.

Chapter III

A Further Account of Ah Q's Victories

Although Ah Q was always gaining victories, it was only after he was favoured with a slap on the face by Mr. Chao that he became famous.

After paying the bailiff two hundred cash as gratuity he lay down angrily. Later he thought to himself, "What is the world coming to nowadays, with sons beating their parents. . . ." Then he suddenly remembered Mr. Chao's prestige, and how he was now his son, until gradually he became pleased, got up and went to the wineshop, singing *The Youthful Widow at her Husband's Grave.* At that time he did feel that Mr. Chao was in a class above most people.

After this incident, strange to relate, everybody did indeed seem to pay him unusual respect. He probably attributed this to the fact that he was Mr. Chao's father, but actually such was not the case. In Weichuang, as a rule, if the seventh child hit the eighth child or the fourth Li hit the third Chang, it would not be taken seriously. A beating had to be connected with some important personage like Mr. Chao before the villagers thought it worth talking about; but once they thought it worth talking about, since the beater was famous the one beaten also had some of his reflected fame. As for the fault being Ah Q's, that was naturally taken for granted. The reason for this was simply that Mr. Chao could not possibly be wrong. But if Ah Q were wrong, why did everybody seem to treat him with unusual respect? This is difficult to explain. We may put forward the hypothesis that perhaps it was because Ah Q

had said he belonged to the same family as Mr. Chao, so that although he had been beaten, people were still afraid there might be some truth in what he said and therefore it would be safer to treat him more respectfully. Or, alternatively, it might have been like the case of the sacrificial ox in the Confucian temple: that is, although the ox was in the same category as the sacrificial pig and sheep, being an animal just as they were, since the sage had enjoyed it, the later Confucians did not dare to touch it.

After this Ah Q passed several years in triumphant satisfaction.

One year in spring, when he was walking along in a state of happy intoxication, he saw Whiskers Wang sitting stripped to the waist in the sunlight at the foot of a wall, catching lice; and at the sight of this his own body began to itch. This Whiskers Wang was scabby and bewhiskered, and everybody called him "Ringworm Whiskers Wang". Ah Q omitted the word "Ringworm", but had the greatest contempt for him. Ah Q's idea was that while scabs were not the things to take exception to, such hairy cheeks were really too extraordinary, so that people could not help despising such a fellow. Accordingly Ah Q sat down side by side with him. Now if it had been any other idler, Ah Q would never have dared sit down so casually; but what had he to fear by the side of Whiskers Wang? To tell the truth, the fact that he was willing to sit down was an honour for Wang.

Ah Q took off his tattered padded jacket, and turned it inside out, but either because he had recently washed or because he was too clumsy, although he searched for a long time he could only catch three or four lice. He saw that Whiskers Wang, on the other hand, was catching first one and then another in swift succession, busily putting them in his mouth with a popping sound.

Ah Q felt first disappointed and then resentful: the despicable Whiskers Wang could catch so many while he himself had caught so few — what a great loss of face this involved! He was very eager to catch one or two big ones, but there were none, and it was only with considerable difficulty that he managed to catch a middle-sized one, which he thrust fiercely into his mouth and bit savagely; but it only gave a small sputtering sound, again inferior to the noise Whiskers Wang was making.

All his scars turned scarlet; he flung his jacket on the ground, spat and said, "Worm!"

"Mangy dog, who are you cursing?" asked Whiskers Wang, looking up contemptuously.

Although Ah Q had recently received comparatively more respect, and had consequently grown even more conceited, when confronted by people who were accustomed to fighting he was still usually rather timid; but this time he was exceptionally pugnacious. How dare a hairy cheeked creature like this say anything impertinent? "I am cursing whoever acknowledges it," said Ah Q, standing up, his arms on his hips.

"Are your bones aching?" asked Whiskers Wang, standing up too and putting on his coat.

Ah Q thought he meant to run away, so stepping forward he raised his fist to punch him. But before his fist reached Whiskers Wang, the latter had already seized him and given him a tug which made Ah Q fall head over heels. Whiskers Wang immediately seized his pigtail and started dragging him towards the wall to knock his head in the time-honoured manner.

"'A gentleman uses his tongue but not his hands!'" protested Ah Q, with his head on one side.

Apparently Whiskers Wang was no gentleman, for without paying the slightest attention to what Ah Q had said he knocked his head against the wall five times in succession, and then gave him a great shove which sent him staggering two yards away. Only then did Whiskers Wang walk away satisfied.

As far as Ah Q could remember, this was the first humiliation of his life, because he had always scoffed at Whiskers Wang on account of his ugly whiskered cheeks, but had never been scoffed at by him, much less beaten by him. And now, contrary to all expectation, Whiskers Wang had beaten him. Perhaps what they said in the market place was really true: "The Emperor has abolished the official examinations, so that scholars who have passed them are no longer in demand." As a result of this the Chao family must have lost prestige. Was it as a result of this too that people were treating him contemptuously?

Ah Q stood there irresolutely.

From the distance approached a man who proved to be another of Ah Q's enemies. This was another of the people whom Ah Q despised most, Mr. Chien's eldest son. Formerly he had gone to the city to study in a foreign school, after which he had somehow also gone to Japan. When he came home half a year later his legs

were straight and his pigtail had disappeared. His mother cried bitterly a dozen times, and his wife jumped into the well three times. Later his mother told everyone, "His pigtail was cut off by some scoundrel when he was drunk. He would have been able to be an official, but now he will have to wait until it has grown again before he thinks of that." However, Ah Q did not believe this and insisted on calling him "Imitation Foreign Devil" and "Traitor in Foreign Pay". As soon as he saw him he would start cursing him under his breath.

What Ah Q despised and detested most in him was his false pigtail. When it came to having a false pigtail, a man could scarcely be considered as human; and the fact that his wife had not jumped into the well a fourth time showed that she was not a good woman either.

This "Imitation Foreign Devil" was approaching.

"Baldhead — Ass — " In the past Ah Q had only cursed under his breath, without any audible words; but on this occasion because he was in a bad temper and because he wanted to work off his feelings the words slipped out involuntarily.

Unfortunately this "baldhead" was carrying a shiny, brown stick which Ah Q called a "staff carried by the mourner"; and with great strides he came up to him. Ah Q knew at once that a beating was probably impending and hastily braced himself, waiting with a stiffened back; and sure enough, there was a resounding thwack which seemed to have alighted on his head.

"I meant him!" explained Ah Q, pointing to a nearby child.

Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!

As far as Ah Q could remember this was probably the second humiliation of his life. Fortunately after the thwacking noise stopped it seemed to him that the matter was closed, and he even felt somewhat relieved. Moreover the precious "ability to forget" handed down by his ancestors, also stood him in good stead; he walked slowly away and by the time he was approaching the wineshop door he already felt quite happy.

However, from the opposite direction came walking a small nun from the Convent of Quiet Self-improvement. In ordinary times if Ah Q saw her he would certainly want to swear, so what after his humiliations? He immediately recalled what had happened and became angry again.

"I didn't know why I should be so unlucky today, but after all it was because I had to see you!" he thought to himself.

He went up to her, spat noisily and said "Ugh! . . . Pah!"

The small nun paid not the least attention to him, but walked on with lowered head. Ah Q walked up beside her and suddenly stretched out his hand to rub her newly shaved scalp, then laughing stupidly, said "Baldhead! Go back quickly, your monk is waiting for you. . . ."

"What are you laying hands on me for? . . ." said the nun, blushing crimson, walking quickly away.

The people in the wineshop roared with laughter. Ah Q seeing that his feat had won appreciation began to feel elated.

"If the monk lays hands on you, why can't I?" said he, pinching her cheek.

Again the people in the wineshop roared with laughter. Ah Q felt even more pleased, and in order to satisfy those who were expressing approval, he pinched her hard again before letting her go.

During this encounter he had already forgotten Whiskers Wang and the Imitation Foreign Devil, as if all the day's bad luck had been avenged. And, strange to relate, it seemed as if his whole body was even more comfortable than after the beating, being light and buoyant as if ready to float into the air.

"Ah Q, may you die sonless!" sounded the little nun's voice tearfully in the distance.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Ah Q in complete satisfaction.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the people in the wineshop, also much amused.

Chapter IV

The Tragedy of Romance

Some say that there are victors who take no pleasure in a victory unless their opponents are as fierce as tigers or eagles; and if their opponents are as timid as sheep or chickens then they feel the victory is an empty one. Again there are other victors who, after having conquered everything, with the enemy slain or surrend-

ing themselves and cowering before them in utter subjection, realise that now they are left with no enemy, rival or friend, but only themselves on top of all, alone, solitary, desolate and forlorn. And then they feel the victory is a tragic one. But our hero was not so wanting in guts: he was always exultant. This may be a proof of China's supremacy of spiritual civilisation over the rest of the world.

Look at Ah Q, light and elated, as if about to fly!

But this victory was not without strange consequences. For quite a time he seemed to be flying, and he flew into the Tutelary God's Temple, where he would normally have snored as soon as he lay down. However this evening he found it very difficult to close his eyes, for he felt as if there were something the matter with his thumb and first finger, which seemed to be smoother than usual. It is impossible to say whether something soft and sticky on the little nun's face had stuck to his fingers, or whether his fingers had been rubbed smooth against her cheek.

"Ah Q, may you die sonless!"

These words sounded again in Ah Q's ears, and he thought, "Quite right, I should have a wife; for if a man dies sonless he has no one to sacrifice a bowl of rice to his spirit . . . I ought to have a wife." As the saying goes, "There are three forms of unfilial conduct, of which the worst is to have no descendants," and it is a great sorrow of life that "Spirits without descendants go hungry." Thus his view was absolutely in accordance with the teachings of the saints and sages, and it was indeed a pity that later he should run wild and be unable to stop.

". . . The monk lays hands on . . . Woman, woman. Woman!" he thought again.

We shall never know when Ah Q finally fell asleep that evening. However, probably after this he always felt his fingers rather soft and smooth, so that he was always a little light-headed after this. "Woman . . . " he kept thinking.

From this we can see that woman is a menace to mankind.

The majority of Chinese men could become saints and sages, were it not for the unfortunate fact that they are ruined by women. The Shang dynasty was destroyed by Ta-Chi, the Chou dynasty was undermined by Pao Szu; as for the Chin dynasty, although there is no historical evidence to that effect, yet if we assume that it

fell on account of some woman we shall probably not be far wrong. And it is a fact that Tung Cho's death was caused by Tiao Chan.

Ah Q too had been a man of strict morals to begin with. Although we do not know whether he was guided by some good teacher, still he had always shown himself most scrupulous in observing the "strict separation of the sexes", and was righteous enough to denounce such heretics as the little nun and the Imitation Foreign Devil. His view was, "All nuns must have clandestine relations with monks. When a woman walks alone on the street, she must be wanting to seduce bad men. When a man and a woman talk together, they must be making an assignation." In order to correct them he would always glare furiously at such people, or else make a few cutting remarks in a loud voice; or if the place was deserted, he would throw a small stone from behind.

Who could tell that close to the age of thirty, when a man should "stand firm", he would lose his head like this over a little nun. Such a feeling of light-headedness, according to the classical canons, should not have existed; thus women certainly are hateful creatures. For if the little nun's face had not been soft and sticky, Ah Q would not have been bewitched by her; nor would this have happened if the little nun's face had been covered by a cloth. Five or six years before, among the audience of an open-air stage performance, he had pinched a woman's thigh; but because it was separated from him by the cloth of her trousers he did not feel light-headed like this afterwards. But the little nun did not cover her face, and this is another proof of the odiousness of the heretic.

"Woman . . . " thought Ah Q.

He kept a close watch on those women who he believed must be "wanting to seduce bad men", but they did not smile at him. He listened very carefully to those women who talked to him, but not one of them mentioned anything relevant to an assignation. Ah! this was simply another example of the odiousness of women: they all assumed a false modesty.

One day when Ah Q was grinding rice in Mr. Chao's house, he sat down in the kitchen after supper to smoke a pipe. If he had been in anyone else's house, he could have gone home after supper, but they had dinner early in the Chao family. Although it was the rule that you must not light a lamp, but go to bed after eating, still there were occasional exceptions to the rule: first, before

Mr. Chao's son had passed the official county examination he was allowed to light a lamp to study the examination essays; second, when Ah Q came to do odd jobs he was allowed to light a lamp to grind rice. Because of this latter exception to the rule, Ah Q was still sitting in the kitchen smoking, as a preliminary to grinding rice again.

Amah Wu, the only maid servant in the Chao household, after washing the dishes also sat down on the long bench and started chatting to Ah Q:

"Our mistress hasn't eaten anything for two days, because the master wants to get a concubine. . . ."

"Woman . . . Amah Wu . . . this little widow," thought Ah Q.

"Our young mistress is going to have a baby in the eighth moon. . . ."

"Woman . . ." thought Ah Q.

He put down his pipe and stood up.

Amah Wu went on garrulously, "Our young mistress—" .

"Sleep with me!" Ah Q suddenly rushed up and kneeled before her.

There was a moment of absolute silence.

"Ai ya!" Amah Wu, dumbfounded for an instant, suddenly began to tremble, and she rushed out, shrieking as she ran, soon sounding as if she were in tears.

Ah Q kneeling opposite the wall also was dumbfounded, so he grasped the empty bench with both hands and stood up slowly, vaguely conscious that there was something wrong. In fact by this time he was also in rather a nervous state. Flurriedly he stuck his pipe into his belt, and thought he would go back to grind rice. There was a bang as his head received a heavy blow, and he turned round hastily to see the successful county candidate standing before him brandishing a big bamboo pole.

"How dare you . . . you. . . ."

The big bamboo pole came down across his shoulders. Ah Q put up both hands to protect his head, and the blow landed on his knuckles, causing him considerable pain. As he escaped through the kitchen door it seemed as if his back also received a blow.

"Bastard!" said the successful candidate, cursing him in Mandarin from behind.

Ah Q fled to the mill floor where he stood alone, still feeling a pain in his knuckles and still remembering the "bastard" because this expression was never used by the country people in Weichuang, but only by the rich people who had seen something of official life. So he was the more frightened, and it made an exceptionally deep impression on his mind. However, by now his thought of "Woman . . ." had also dissipated. After this cursing and beating it seemed as if something was done with, and he even felt quite light-hearted as he went to start grinding rice. After grinding for a time he began to grow hot, and stopped to take off his jacket.

While he was taking off his jacket he heard an uproar outside, and since Ah Q always liked to watch a tumultuous scene, he went out in search of the sound. He traced the sound gradually right into Mr. Chao's inner courtyard. Although it was dusk he could see many people there; all the Chao family was there including the mistress who had not eaten for two days. In addition, there were their neighbour Tsou Chi-sao and their relatives Chao Pai-yen and Chao Szu-chen.

The young mistress was just leading Amah Wu out of the servants' quarters, saying as she did so:

"Come outside . . . don't stay brooding in your own room."

"Everybody knows you are a good woman," put in Tsou Chi-sao from the side, "you mustn't think of committing suicide."

Amah Wu merely wailed, uttering something which was not quite discernible.

"This is interesting," thought Ah Q. "What mischief can this little widow be up to?" Wanting to find out, he went up to Chao Szu-chen, when suddenly he caught sight of Mr. Chao's eldest son rushing towards him with, what was more, the big bamboo pole in his hand. At the sight of this big bamboo pole he suddenly remembered that he had been beaten by it, and saw that apparently he was connected in some way with this scene of excitement. He turned and ran, hoping to escape to the mill, not foreseeing that the bamboo pole would cut off his way of retreat; thereupon he turned again and ran in the other direction, leaving without further ado by the back door; and in a short time he was back in the Tutelary God's Temple.

After Ah Q had sat down for a time, his skin began to form goose pimples and he felt cold, because although it was spring the

nights were still quite frosty and not suited to bare backs. Then he remembered that he had left his jacket in the Chao family, but he was afraid if he went to fetch it he might taste some more of the successful candidate's bamboo pole.

Then the bailiff came in.

"Ah Q, you son of a bitch!" said the bailiff. So you must trifle even with the Chao family servants; you are simply a rebel. You have made me lose my sleep at night, you son of a bitch! . . ."

Under this torrent of abuse Ah Q naturally had nothing to say. Finally, since it was night-time, Ah Q ought to double the gratuity and give the bailiff four hundred cash, but because he happened not to have any ready money just then, he gave his felt hat as security, and agreed to the following five terms:

1. The next morning he must take a pair of red candles, weighing one pound, and a bundle of incense sticks to the Chao family to atone for his fault.
2. Ah Q must pay for the Taoist priests whom the Chao family had called to exorcise *Death by Hanging*.
3. Ah Q must never again set foot in the Chao household.
4. If anything unfortunate should happen to Amah Wu in the future, Ah Q should be held responsible.
5. Ah Q must not go back for his wages or jacket.

Ah Q naturally agreed to everything, only unfortunately he had no ready money. Luckily it was already spring, so it was possible to do without padded quilt; thus he pawned it for two thousand cash to comply with the terms stipulated. After kowtowing with bare back he still had a few cash left, and instead of going to redeem his felt hat from the bailiff, he spent it all on drink.

However, the Chao family neither burnt the incense nor lit the candles because these could be used when the mistress worshipped Buddha, and so they were put aside for that purpose. Most of the ragged jacket was made into diapers for the baby which was born to the young mistress in the eighth moon, while the tattered remainder was used by Amah Wu to make shoe soles.

Chapter V

The Problem of Livelihood

After Ah Q had completed this ceremony he went back as usual to the Tutelary God's Temple. The sun had gone down, and he gradually began to feel that there was something strange about the world. He thought carefully and came to the conclusion that this was probably because his back was bare. Remembering that he still had a ragged lined gown, he put it on and lay down, and when he opened his eyes again the sun was already shining on the top of the west wall. He sat up, saying to himself, "Son of a bitch. . . ."

After getting up he loafed about the streets as usual, and gradually began to feel again that there was something strange about the world, though not to be compared to the actual pain he felt from his bare back. It seems that from that day onwards all the women in Weichuang suddenly became shy of him, so that whenever they saw Ah Q coming everyone of them would take refuge indoors. In fact even Tsou Chi-sao who was nearly fifty years old, retreated in confusion with the rest, calling her eleven-year-old daughter to go inside. This struck Ah Q as very strange, and he thought, "These creatures have suddenly all become as coy as young ladies. These bitches! . . ."

A good many days later, however, he felt even more strongly that there was something strange about the world. In the first place, the wineshop refused him credit; in the second place, the old man in charge of the Tutelary God's Temple made some uncalled-for remarks, as if he wanted Ah Q to leave; in the third place, although he could not remember the exact number of days, there were at least a good many when not a single person had come to ask him to do odd jobs. To be refused credit in the wineshop he could put up with; if the old man kept urging him to leave, Ah Q could just ignore his gabbing; but when no one came to ask him to work, then he had to go hungry; and this was really a "son of a bitch" state to be in.

When Ah Q could stand it no longer he went to his regular employers' houses to find out what was the matter — it was only Mr. Chao's threshold that he was not allowed to cross — but he also found things very strange: the one to appear was always a man,

looking thoroughly annoyed and shaking his fist as if to drive away a beggar, saying:

"There is nothing, nothing at all! Go away!"

Ah Q found it more and more queer. He thought, "These people always could not do without help, they can't suddenly have nothing to be done; there must be some monkey business somewhere." But after making careful enquiries he found out that when they had any odd jobs they all called in Little Don. Now this little D was a pauper, lean and weakly, even lower in Ah Q's eyes than Whiskers Wang. Who could have thought then that this mean fellow would steal his living from him? So Ah Q's indignation this time was greater than on ordinary occasions, and as he, fuming, went on his way, he suddenly raised his arm and sang: *"I thrash you with a steel mace. . . ."*

A few days later he did indeed meet Little D in front of Mr. Chien's house. "When two foes meet, their eyes flash fire." Ah Q went up to him, and Little D stood still.

"Dumb brute!" said Ah Q, glaring furiously and foaming at the mouth.

"I'm an insect; will that do? . . ." asked Little D.

Such modesty only made Ah Q angrier than ever, but since he had no steel mace in his hand, all he could do was to rush on and stretch out his hand to seize Little D's pigtail. Little D, protecting his pigtail with one hand, with the other tried to seize Ah Q's, whereupon Ah Q also used one free hand to protect his own pigtail. In the past Ah Q had never considered Little D worth taking seriously, but since Ah Q had recently suffered from hunger, he was already as thin and weakly as his opponent, so that they presented a spectacle of evenly matched antagonists. Four hands clutched at two heads, both men bending at the waist, casting a blue, rainbow-shaped shadow on the Chien family's white wall for over half an hour.

"All right! All right!" exclaimed the onlookers, probably trying to make peace.

"Good, good!" others exclaimed, but whether to make peace, applaud the fighters or incite them on to further efforts, it is not certain.

But the two combatants turned deaf ears to all. If Ah Q advanced three paces, then Little D would recoil three paces, and so

they would stand still. If Little D advanced three paces, then Ah Q would recoil three paces, and so they would stand still again. After about half an hour, — Weichuang had few striking clocks, so it is difficult to tell the time. Maybe it was twenty minutes — when steam was rising from both their heads and perspiration pouring down their cheeks, Ah Q let fall his hands, and in the same second Little D's hands fell too. They straightened up simultaneously and stepped back simultaneously, pushing their way out through the crowd.

"You'll be hearing from me again, you son of a bitch! . . ." said Ah Q over his shoulder.

"You son of a bitch, you'll be hearing from me again. . . ." echoed Little D, also over his shoulder.

This epic struggle had apparently ended neither in victory nor defeat, and it is not known whether the spectators were satisfied or not, for none of them expressed any opinion. But still not a single person came to call Ah Q to do odd jobs.

One very warm day, when a soft warm breeze seemed to give some foretaste of summer, Ah Q actually began to feel cold; but he could put up with this — his greatest worry was an empty stomach. His cotton quilt, felt hat and jacket had disappeared long ago, and after that he had sold his padded jacket. Now nothing was left but his trousers, and of course he could not take them off. He had a ragged lined jacket, it is true, but apart from giving it away to be made into shoe soles, it was certainly not worth anything. He had long been hoping to pick up a sum of money in the road, but hitherto he had not been successful; he had also hoped he might suddenly discover a sum of money in his tumble-down room, and had looked wildly all around it, but the room was quite, quite empty. Thereupon he made up his mind to go out in search of food.

As he was walking along the road "in search of food" he saw the familiar wineshop and the familiar steamed bread, but he passed them by, not only without pausing for a second but without even feeling the desire for them. It was not these he was looking for, although what exactly he was looking for he did not know himself.

Weichuang was not a big place, and soon he had left it behind. Most of the country outside the village consisted of paddy fields, green as far as the eye could see with the soft strands of young rice, dotted here and there with round, black, moving

objects, which were the farmers cultivating the fields. But Ah Q had no eye for the delights of country life, and simply walked on his way, because he knew by intuition that this was far removed from his road "in search of food". However, finally he came to the walls of the Convent of Quiet Self-improvement.

The convent too was surrounded by paddy fields, its white walls standing out sharply in the fresh green, and inside the low earthern wall at the back was a vegetable garden. Ah Q hesitated for a time, looking around him; since there was no one in sight he scrambled on to the low wall, holding on to a mandrake vine. The mud wall crumbled with a rustling sound, and Ah Q's feet shook in apprehension; however by clutching at the branch of a mulberry tree he managed to jump inside. Within was a wild profusion of vegetation, but there did not seem to be any yellow wine or steamed bread, or anything else edible. By the west wall was a clump of bamboos, with many bamboo shoots beneath, but unfortunately these were not cooked. There was also rape which had long since gone to seed; the brassica was already in flower, and the small cabbages were very tough.

Ah Q felt as resentful as a scholar who has failed in the examinations, and was walking slowly towards the gate of the garden when suddenly he gave a start for joy, for there before him what should he see but a patch of turnips. He knelt down and began picking, when suddenly a round head appeared from behind the gate, only to be withdrawn again at once, and this was no other than the little nun. Now Ah Q had always had the greatest contempt for such people as little nuns, but there are times when "Discretion is the better part of valour", so he hastily pulled up four turnips, tore off the leaves and folded them in the skirts of his jacket. By this time an old nun had already come out.

"May Buddha preserve us, Ah Q! What made you climb into our garden and steal turnips! . . . Oh dear, what a wicked thing to do! Oh dear, Buddha preserve us! . . ."

"When did I ever climb into your garden and steal turnips?" retorted Ah Q, looking at her as he started off.

"Now — aren't you?" said the old nun, pointing at the folds of his jacket.

"Are these yours? Can you make them answer you? You . . . ."

Leaving his sentence unfinished Ah Q took to his heels as fast

as he could, followed by an enormously fat, black dog. This dog had originally been at the front gate, and it is a mystery how it had reached the back garden. The black dog gave chase, snarling, and was just about to bite Ah Q's leg, when a turnip fell most opportunely from the latter's coat, and the dog, taken by surprise, stopped for a second. During this time Ah Q scrambled on to the mulberry tree, scaled the mud wall and fell, turnips and all, outside the convent. He left the black dog still barking by the mulberry tree, and the old nun saying her prayers.

Fearing that the nun would let the black dog out again, Ah Q gathered together his turnips and ran, and along the road he picked up a few small stones; but the black dog did not appear again. Ah Q threw away the stones and walked on, eating as he went, thinking to himself: "There is nothing to be had here; I had better go to town. . . ."

By the time he had finished the third turnip, he had made up his mind to go to the town.

Chapter VI

From Restoration to Desperation

When next Weichuang saw Ah Q, it was just after the Moon Festival of that year. Everybody was surprised to hear of Ah Q's return, and this made them think back and wonder where he had been before. The few previous occasions on which Ah Q had been to town, he had usually told people about it beforehand with great enthusiasm; but since he had not done so this time, no one had noticed his going. He may have told the old man in charge of the Tutelary God's Temple, but according to the custom of Weichuang, it was only when Mr. Chao, Mr. Chien, or their sons the successful candidates went to town that it was considered important. Even the Imitation Foreign Devil's going was not talked about, much less Ah Q's. This would explain why the old man had not spread the news for him, with the result that the society people of Weichuang had no means of knowing it.

But Ah Q's return this time was very different from before, and in fact quite enough to occasion astonishment. The day was growing dark when he appeared blinking sleepily before the door of the wineshop, walked up to the counter, pulled a handful of silver and coppers from his belt and tossed them on the counter, saying, "Cash, bring the wine!" He was wearing a new, lined jacket, and evidently there was a large purse hung at his waist, the great weight of which caused his belt to sag in a sharp curve. It was the custom in Weichuang that when there seemed to be something unusual about anyone, he should be treated with respect rather than insolence, and now, although they knew quite well that this was Ah Q, still he was very different from the Ah Q of the ragged coat. The ancients say, "One will find a new cause for admiration in a scholar whom he has not seen for three days", and so the waiter, shopkeeper, customers and passers-by, all quite naturally expressed a kind of suspicion mingled with respect. The shopkeeper was the first to nod his head, and say:

"Hullo, Ah Q, so you're back!"

"Yes, I'm back."

"You've made money, you . . . where . . . ?"

"I went to town."

By the next day this piece of news had spread through Weichuang. Everybody wanted to learn about the restoration history of this Ah Q of the ready money and the new lined jacket; so in the wineshop, tea-house, and under the temple eaves, the villagers gradually ferreted out the news. The result was that they began to have a new fear of Ah Q.

According to Ah Q, he had been a servant in the house of a successful provincial candidate. This part of the story filled all those who heard it with awe. This successful provincial candidate was named Pai, but because he was the only successful provincial candidate in the whole town, there was no need to use his surname; for whenever anyone spoke of The Successful Provincial Candidate, it meant him. And this was so not only in Weichuang but everywhere within a radius of thirty miles, as if everybody imagined his name was Mr. Successful Provincial Candidate. To have worked in the household of such a man naturally called for respect; but according to Ah Q's further statements, he was unwilling to go on working there because this successful candidate was really too much of a "son of a

bitch". This part of the story made all who heard it sigh but at the same time feel pleased, because it showed that Ah Q was really not fit to work in the household of the Successful Provincial Candidate, and yet not to work was a pity.

According to Ah Q, his return was also due to the fact that he was not satisfied with the townspeople for the reason that they called a long bench a straight bench, and used shredded scallion to fry fish, and added to this was a defect he had recently discovered, that the women did not sway in a very satisfactory manner as they walked. However, the town also had some good points which he admired greatly; for instance, while the Weichuang villagers played with thirty-two bamboo counters, and only the Imitation Foreign Devil could play Mah-jong, even the street urchins in town excelled at the game. You had only to place the Imitation Foreign Devil in the hands of these small rascals in their teens, for him straightway to become like "a small devil before the King of Hell". This part of the story made all who heard it blush.

"Have you seen an execution?" Ah Q asked. "Ah, that's a fine sight. . . . When they execute the revolutionaries . . . ah, that's a fine sight, a fine sight. . . ." He shook his head while his spittle flew onto the face of Chao Szu-chen directly opposite. This part of the story made all who heard it tremble. But then Ah Q looking round him suddenly raised his right hand and dropped it on the neck of Whiskers Wang who, with head thrust forward, was listening raptly, and he shouted, "Kill!"

Whiskers Wang started with surprise, at the same time drawing in his head as quickly as lightning or fire struck from a flint, while all the bystanders shivered with pleasurable apprehension. After this Whiskers Wang went about dazed for many days, and did not dare go near Ah Q again; and the others were the same.

Although we cannot say Ah Q's status in the eyes of the inhabitants of Weichuang at this time was superior to that of Mr. Chao, we can at least say that it was about the same, without any danger of inaccuracy.

But not long after, Ah Q's fame was suddenly spread into the women's apartments of Weichuang too. Although the only two families of any pretensions in Weichuang were those of Chien and Chao, and nine-tenths of the rest were poor, still women's apartments are women's apartments, and this spreading of Ah Q's fame into them is something of a miracle. When the women folk met

they would say to each other, "Tsou Chi-sao bought a blue silk skirt from Ah Q, and although it was old, still it only cost ninety cents. And Chao Pai-yin's mother (This is yet to be verified because some said it was Chao Szu-chen's mother), also bought a child's costume of crimson foreign calico, only spending three hundred coppers, less eight per cent discount."

Then they all longed to see Ah Q, those who had no silk skirt wanting to buy one from him and those who needed foreign calico wanting to buy it from him; thus not only did they no longer avoid Ah Q, but sometimes when he had already gone past they would follow him, calling to him to stop, asking:

"Ah Q, do you have any more silk skirts? No? We want foreign calico too; do you have any?"

Later on this news spread from the poor households to the rich ones, because Tsou Chi-sao was so pleased with her silk skirt that she took it to Mrs. Chao for her approval, and Mrs. Chao told Mr. Chao, speaking very highly of it.

Mr. Chao discussed the matter that evening at the dinner table with his son, the successful county candidate, suggesting that there must really be something queer about Ah Q, and that they should be more careful about their doors and windows. But they did not know whether Ah Q had any things left or not, and thought perhaps he still had something good. Added to this was the fact that Mrs. Chao just happened to be wanting a good, cheap, fur vest. Accordingly after a family council it was decided to ask Tsou Chi-sao to find Ah Q for them at once, and for this a third exception was made to the rule, special permission being given for a lamp to be lit that evening.

The oil lamp had consumed quite a lot of oil, but still Ah Q had not come. The whole Chao household was yawning in impatience, some of them resenting Ah Q's vagrant ways, some of them angry with Tsou Chi-sao for not making an effort. Mrs. Chao was afraid that Ah Q dared not come because of the terms agreed upon that spring, but Mr. Chao did not think this anything to worry about, because, as he said, "This time *I* sent for him." And sure enough, Mr. Chao proved himself a man of insight, when Ah Q finally arrived with Tsou Chi-sao.

"He keeps saying he has nothing left, and when I told him to come and tell you so himself he still wanted to go on talking.

I said . . . " said Tsou Chi-sao, panting for breath as she came in.

"Sir!" said Ah Q with an attempt at a smile, coming to a halt under the eaves.

"I hear you got rich out there, Ah Q," said Mr. Chao going up to him and looking him carefully over. "That is very good. Now, . . . I hear you have some old things . . . bring them all here for us to have a look at, . . . this is simply because I happen to want . . . . "

"I told Tsou Chi-sao — there is nothing left."

"Nothing left?" Mr. Chao could not help sounding disappointed. "How could they go so quickly?"

"They belonged to a friend, and there was not much to begin with. People bought some. . . ."

"There must be something left."

"Now there is only a door curtain left."

"Then bring the door curtain for us to see," said Mrs. Chao hurriedly.

"Well, it will be all right if you bring it tomorrow," said Mr. Chao not very enthusiastically. "When you have anything in the future, Ah Q, you must bring it to us first to see. . . ."

"We certainly will not pay less than other people!" said the successful county candidate. His wife hastily glanced at Ah Q's face to see his reaction.

"I need a fur vest," said Mrs. Chao.

Although Ah Q agreed, he slouched out so carelessly that they did not know whether he had taken it to heart or not. This made Mr. Chao so disappointed, annoyed and worried that he even stopped yawning. The successful candidate was also far from satisfied with Ah Q's attitude, and said, "People should be on their guard against such a bastard. It might be best to order the bailiff not to allow him to live in Weichuang."

But Mr. Chao did not agree, saying this might make him bear a grudge, and that in a business like his it was probably a case of "the eagle does not prey on what is in its own nest"; so that his own village need not worry, and they need only be a little more watchful at night. The successful candidate was much impressed by this parental instruction, and immediately withdrew his proposal for driving Ah Q away, cautioning Tsou Chi-sao on no account to repeat what he had said to other people.

However, the next day Tsou Chi-sao took her blue skirt to be dyed black and repeated these suspicions of Ah Q, although she actually did not mention what the successful candidate had said about driving him away. But even so, it was most damaging for Ah Q. In the first place, the bailiff appeared at his door and took away the door curtain, and although Ah Q protested that Mrs. Chao wanted to see it, the bailiff would not give it back, and even demanded a monthly payment of hush-money. In the second place, the villagers' respect for him suddenly changed, and although they still did not dare take freedoms with him, they avoided him as much as possible, and this was different again from their previous fear of his "Kill!", but closely resembled the attitude of the ancients to spirits: "keeping a respectful distance."

But there were some idlers who wanted to get to the bottom of the business, who went to question Ah Q carefully. And Ah Q did not try to conceal anything, but told them proudly of his experiences. From this they learned that he had merely been a petty thief, not only unable to climb walls, but even unable to go through openings, simply standing outside an opening to receive the stolen goods.

One night he had just received a package and his chief had gone in again, when he heard a great uproar inside, and took to his heels as fast as he could. He fled from the town that same night, escaping back to Weichuang; and after this he dared not return to that business. However, this story was even more damaging to Ah Q, for the villagers had been "keeping a respectful distance" because they did not want to incur his enmity; for who could have guessed that he was only a thief who dared not steal again? But now they knew he was really "too low to inspire fear".

Chapter VII

The Revolution

On the fourteenth day of the ninth moon of the third year in the reign of Emperor Hsuan Tung — the day on which Ah Q sold his purse to Chao Pai-yen — at midnight, after the fourth stroke of

the third watch, a large boat with a big black awning came to the Chao family's landing place. This boat floated up in the darkness while the villagers were sound asleep, so that they knew nothing about it; but it left again about dawn, when quite a number of people saw it. The outcome of a prying investigation was that this boat actually belonged to the Successful Provincial Candidate!

This boat caused great uneasiness in Weichuang, and before midday the hearts of all the villagers were beating faster. The Chao family kept very quiet about the errand of the boat, but according to the gossip in the tea-house and wineshop, the revolutionaries were going to enter the town and the Successful Provincial Candidate had come to the country to take refuge. Only Tsou Chi-sao thought otherwise, saying there were only a few battered cases which the Successful Provincial Candidate wanted to deposit in Weichuang, but which Mr. Chao had sent back. Actually the Successful Provincial Candidate and the successful county candidate in the Chao family were not on good terms, so that it was scarcely logical to expect them to prove "friends in adversity"; moreover, Tsou Chi-sao was a neighbour of the Chao family, and had a better idea of what was going on, so she ought to have known.

Then a rumour spread to the effect that although the scholar had not arrived himself, he had sent a long letter tracing some distant relationship with the Chao family; and Mr. Chao after thinking it over had decided it could, after all, do him no harm, so he had kept the cases, which were now put away under his wife's bed. As for the revolutionaries, some people said they had entered the town that night, all wearing white helmets and white armour — the mourning dress for Chung Ching, the last Emperor of the Ming dynasty.

Ah Q had long since heard of the revolutionaries, and this year he had seen with his own eyes revolutionaries being decapitated. But somehow it occurred to him that the revolutionaries were rebelling and that a rebellion would make things difficult for him, so that he had always "deeply detested them and severed all relations". Who could have guessed they could so frighten a Successful Provincial Candidate renowned for thirty miles around? In consequence, Ah Q could not help feeling rather "entranced"; while the terror of all the damned men and women of Weichuang also added to his delight.

"A revolution is not a bad thing," thought Ah Q. "Put an end to all these bastards . . . they are too despicable, too detestable! . . . Even I also want to go over to the revolutionaries."

Ah Q had been hard up recently, and was probably rather dissatisfied; added to this was the fact that he had drunk two bowls of wine at noon on an empty stomach. Consequently, he got drunk more quickly than ever; as he walked along thinking to himself, he felt again as if he were treading on air. Suddenly, in some curious way, he felt as if the revolutionaries were himself, and that all the people in Weichuang were his captives. Unable to contain himself for joy, he could not help shouting in a loud voice:

"Rebellion! Rebellion!"

All the people in Weichuang looked at him in consternation. Ah Q had never seen such pitiful looks before, and these glances made him as comfortable as a drink of iced water in mid-summer. So he walked on even more happily, shouting:

"All right . . . I shall take what I want. I shall like whom I please.

"Tra la, tra la!

"I regret to have killed by mistake my good friend Chen, in my cups.

"I regret to have killed . . . Ya, ya, ya.

"Tra la, tra la, tum ti tum tum!

"I thrash you with a steel mace."

Mr. Chao and his son were just standing at their gate with two relatives discussing the revolution. But Ah Q did not see them as he went past singing with his head thrown back: "Tra la la, tum ti tum!"

"Q old chap," Mr. Chao, greeting him, called out timidly in a low voice.

"Tra la!" sang Ah Q, unable to imagine that his name could be linked with those words "old chap", thinking that he must have heard wrongly and that it had nothing to do with him; so he simply went on singing, *"Tra la la, tum ti tum!"*

"Q, old chap!"

"I regret to have killed . . . . "

"Ah Q!" The successful candidate found nothing for it but to call him by his name.

Only then did Ah Q come to a stop. "Well?" he asked with his head on one side.

"Q, old chap . . . now . . . . " But Mr. Chao was at a loss for words again. Now, are you getting rich?"

"Getting rich? Of course. I take what I like. . . ."

"Ah — Q, old man, poor friends of yours like us can't possibly matter . . . " said Chao Pai-yen apprehensively, as if sounding out the revolutionaries' attitude.

"Poor friends? Surely you are richer than I am," said Ah Q, and walked away.

They stood there despondent and speechless; then Mr. Chao and his son went back to the house, and that evening discussed the question until it was time to light the lamps. When Chao Pai-yen went home he took the purse from his waist and gave it to his wife to hide for him at the bottom of a chest.

For some time Ah Q seemed to be walking on air, but by the time he reached the Tutelary God's Temple he was sober again. That evening the old man in charge of the temple was also unexpectedly friendly and offered him tea; then Ah Q asked him for two flat cakes, and after eating these asked him for a four ounce candle that had been used, and a candlestick. He lit the candle and lay down alone in his little room. He felt inexpressibly refreshed and happy, while the candlelight leapt and flickered as on the Lantern Festival and his imagination too seemed to soar.

"Revolt? It would be fun. . . . A group of revolutionaries would come, all wearing white helmets and white armour, carrying flat knives, steel maces, bombs, foreign guns, double-edged knives with sharp points and spears with hooks. They would come to the Tutelary God's Temple and call out, 'Ah Q! Come with us, come with us!' And then I would go with them. . . .

"Then all those damned men and women in Weichuang would be in a laughable plight, kneeling down and pleading, 'Ah Q, spare our lives.' But who would listen to them! The first to die would be Little D and Mr. Chao, and then there would be the successful county candidate and the Imitation Foreign Devil . . . but perhaps I would spare a few. I would originally have spared Whiskers Wang, but now I don't even want him either. . . .

"Things, . . . I would go straight in and open the cases: silver ingots, foreign coins, foreign muslin jackets . . . . First I would move the successful county candidate's wife's Ningpo bed to the temple, and also move in the Chien family tables and

chairs, — or else just use the Chao family's. I would not lift a finger myself, but order Little D to move the things for me, and move them quickly too, unless he wanted a slap on the face. . . .

"Chao Szu-chen's younger sister is very ugly. In a few years Tsou Chi-sao's daughter might be worth considering. The Imitation Foreign Devil's wife is willing to sleep with a man without a pigtail, hah! She can't be a good woman! The successful county candidate's wife has scars on her eyes. . . . I have not seen Amah Wu for a long time, and don't know where she is, — what a pity her feet are too big."

Before Ah Q had reached a satisfactory conclusion, there was a sound of snoring. The four ounce candle had only burnt down half an inch, and its flickering red light lit up his open mouth.

"Ho, ho!" shouted Ah Q suddenly, raising his head and looking wildly around; but when he saw the four ounce candle, he lay back and went to sleep again.

The next morning he got up very late, and when he went out to the street everything was still the same. He was still hungry, but though he racked his brains he did not seem able to think of anything; then suddenly an idea seemed to come to him, and he walked slowly off, until intentionally or unintentionally he reached the Convent of Quiet Self-improvement.

The convent was as peaceful as it had been that spring, with its white wall and shining black gate. He thought for a moment, then went up to knock at the gate, whereupon a dog started barking within. He hastily picked up several pieces of broken brick, and went up again to knock more heavily, knocking until a number of small dents appeared on the black gate; and then at last he heard someone coming to open the door.

Ah Q hastily got ready his broken bricks, and stood with his legs wide apart, prepared to do battle with the black dog. But the convent door only opened a crack, and no black dog rushed out, and when he looked in all he could see was the old nun.

"What are you here for again?" she asked, giving a start.

"There is a revolution . . . did you know?" said Ah Q vaguely.

"Revolution, revolution . . . there has already been one. What do you think will become of us with all your revolutions?" said the old nun, her eyes turning red.

"What?" asked Ah Q in astonishment.

"Didn't you know? The revolutionaries have already been here.!"

"Who?" asked Ah Q in even greater astonishment.

"The successful county candidate and the Imitation Foreign Devil."

This came as a complete surprise to Ah Q, who could not help being taken aback. When the old nun saw that he had lost his aggressiveness, she quickly shut the gate, so that when Ah Q pushed it again he could not budge it, and when he knocked again there was no answer.

It had happened that morning. The successful county candidate in the Chao family got news quickly, and as soon as he heard that the revolutionaries had entered the town that night, he had immediately wound his pigtail up on his head and gone out first thing to call on the Imitation Foreign Devil in the Chien family, with whom he had never been on good terms. This was a time for "all to work for reforms", so they had a very pleasant talk and became on the spot congenial comrades pledging themselves to become revolutionaries.

After racking their brains for some time, they remembered that in the Convent of Quiet Self-improvement was an imperial tablet inscribed "Long live the Emperor . . ." which ought to be done away with at once. Thereupon they lost no time in going to the convent to carry out their revolutionary activities. Because the old nun tried to stop them, and put in a few words, they considered her as the Manchu government and knocked her many times on the head with a stick and with their knuckles. The nun pulling herself together after they had gone, made an inspection. Naturally the imperial tablet had been smashed into fragments on the ground, but the valuable Hsuan Te censer before the shrine of Kuan Yin had also disappeared.

Ah Q only learned this later. He deeply regretted having been asleep at the time, and resented the fact that they had not come to call him. Then he looked upon the matter broad-mindedly and said to himself, "Can it mean they still don't know I have gone over to the revolutionaries?"

Chapter VIII

Barred from the Revolution

The people of Weichuang became more reassured every day. From the news that was brought they knew that although the revolutionaries had entered the town, their coming had not made a great deal of difference. The magistrate was still the highest official, it was only his title that had changed; and the Successful Provincial Candidate also had some post — the Weichuang villagers could not remember these names clearly — some kind of official post; while the head of the military was also still the old captain. The only cause for alarm was that there were also some bad revolutionaries making trouble, who had started cutting off people's pigtails the day after their arrival. It was said that the boatman "Seven Pounds" from the next village had fallen into their clutches, and that he no longer looked presentable. Still, the danger of this was not great, because the Weichuang villagers seldom went to town to begin with, and if any of them had happened to mean to go to town, they now changed their plans at once in order to avoid this risk. Ah Q had been thinking of going to town to look up his old friends, but as soon as he heard the news he resignedly gave up the idea.

It would be wrong, however, to say that there was no reform in Weichuang. During the next few days the number of people who wound their pigtails up on their heads gradually increased, and, as has been said already, the first to do so was naturally the successful county candidate; the next were Chao Szu-chen and Chao Pai-yen, and after them Ah Q. If it had been summer it would not have been considered strange if everybody had wound their pigtails up on their heads or tied them in knots; but this was late autumn, so that this "autumn observance of a summer practice" on the part of those who wound their pigtails up on their heads can be considered nothing short of a heroic decision, and as far as Weichuang was concerned it cannot be said to have had no connection with the reforms.

When Chao Szu-chen approached with the nape of his neck bared, people who saw him would say, "Ah! here comes a revolutionary!"

When Ah Q heard this he was greatly impressed. Although he had long since heard the news of the successful county candidate's winding his pigtail up on his head, it had never occurred to him that he might do the same himself; only now that he saw Chao Szu-chen had followed suit too he was struck with the idea of doing the same himself, and made up his mind to copy them. He used a bamboo chopstick to twist his pigtail up on his head, and after hesitating for some time eventually summoned up the courage to go out.

As he walked along the street people looked at him, but nobody said anything. Ah Q was very displeased at first, and then he became very resentful. Recently he had been losing his temper very easily. Although as a matter of fact his life was not any harder than before the revolution, and people treated him politely and the shops no longer demanded payment in cash, yet Ah Q still felt dissatisfied. He thought since a revolution had taken place, it should be something more than this. And then he saw Little D, and the sight made his anger boil over.

Little D had also wound his pigtail up on his head, and what was more, he had actually used a bamboo chopstick to do so too. Ah Q had never imagined that Little D would also have the courage to do this; he certainly could not tolerate such a thing! What was Little D anyway? He was greatly tempted to seize him there and then, break his bamboo chopstick, let down his pigtail and slap his face several times into the bargain to punish him for forgetting his place and for his presumption in becoming a revolutionary. But in the end he let him off, simply fixing him with a furious glare, spitting, and exclaiming, "Pah!"

These last few days the only one to go to town was the Imitation Foreign Devil. The successful county candidate in the Chao family had thought of using the deposited cases as a pretext to go and call on the Successful Provincial Candidate, but because of the danger that he might have his pigtail cut off he had not gone after all. He had written an extremely formal letter, and asked the Imitation Foreign Devil to take it to town; he had also asked the latter to introduce him to the Liberty Party. When the Imitation Foreign Devil came back he asked the successful county candidate for four dollars, after which the successful county candidate wore a silver peach on his chest. All the Weichuang villagers were overawed, and said that this was the badge of the

Persimmon Oil Party, equivalent to the rank of a Han Lin *. As a result of this Mr. Chao's prestige suddenly increased, far more so in fact than when his son first passed the official examination; consequently he started looking down on everyone else, and, when he saw Ah Q, tended to ignore him a little.

Ah Q was thoroughly discontented and was always feeling himself ignored, but as soon as he heard of this silver peach he realised at once why he was left out in the cold. Simply to say that you had gone over was not enough to make anyone a revolutionary; nor was it enough merely to wind your pigtail up on your head; the most important thing was still to go and get into touch with the revolutionary party. In all his life he had only known two revolutionaries, one of whom had already lost his head in town, leaving only the Imitation Foreign Devil. Unless he went at once to talk things over with the Imitation Foreign Devil there was no other way left open to him.

The front gate of the Chien house happened to be open, and Ah Q crept stealthily in. Once inside he gave a start, for there he saw the Imitation Foreign Devil standing in the middle of the courtyard dressed entirely in black, no doubt in foreign dress, and also wearing a silver peach. In his hand he held the stick with which Ah Q was already acquainted to his cost, and the foot or so of hair which he had grown again fell over his shoulders, hanging dishevelled like a mountain deity's. Standing erect before him were Chao Pai-yen and three others, all of them listening with the utmost deference to what he was saying.

Ah Q tiptoed inside and stood behind Chao Pai-yen, wanting to give a greeting, but not knowing what to say: obviously he could not call him "Imitation Foreign Devil", and neither "Foreigner" nor "Revolutionary" seemed suitable; perhaps the best form of address would be "Mr. Foreigner".

But Mr. Foreigner had not seen him, because with eyes raised he was talking most animatedly:

"I am an impulsive person, so that when we met I kept saying, 'Old Hung, we should get on with it!' But he always answered 'Nein!' — that is a foreign word which you wouldn't understand. — Otherwise we should have succeeded long ago. This is an instance of how cautious he is. He asked me repeatedly to

* The highest literary degree in the Manchu Dynasty (1644-1911).

go to Hupeh, but I would not agree. Who wants to work in such a small place? . . ."

"Er — Er — " Ah Q waited for him to pause, and then screwed up all his courage to speak; but for some reason or other he still did not call him Mr. Foreigner.

The four men who had been listening to Mr. Chien all gave a start and turned to stare at Ah Q. Mr. Foreigner too caught sight of him then for the first time.

"What?"

"I . . . . "

"Clear out!"

"I want to join . . . . "

"Get out!" said Mr. Foreigner, lifting the "mourner's stick".

Then Chao Pai-yen and the others all shouted, "Mr. Chien tells you to get out, don't you hear!"

Ah Q put up his hands to protect his head, and without knowing what he was doing fled through the gate; and this time Mr. Foreigner did not give chase. After running more than sixty steps he began to slow down, and now he began to feel extremely distressed, because if Mr. Foreigner would not allow him to be a revolutionary, there was no other way open to him. In future he could never hope to have men in white helmets and white armour coming to call him. All his ambition, aims, hope and future had been blasted at one blow. The fact that people might spread the news and make him a laughing-stock for the likes of Little D and Whiskers Wang was only a secondary consideration.

Never before did he seem to have felt so flat. Even the question of winding his pigtail up on his head now appeared to him pointless and was liable to invite ridicule. As a form of revenge he was very tempted to let his pigtail down at once, but he did not do so. He wandered about till evening, and after ordering two bowls of wine on credit and drinking them he began to feel in better spirits, and fragmentary visions of white helmets and white armour appeared again in his mind.

One day he loafed about until late at night. Only when the wineshop was about to close did he start to stroll back to the Tutelary God's Temple.

"Bang — bump!"

He suddenly heard an unusual sound, which could not have been firecrackers. Ah Q always liked excitement, and enjoyed poking

his nose into other people's business, so he went looking for the noise in the darkness. He seemed to hear footsteps ahead, and was listening carefully when a man suddenly rushed out in front of him. As soon as Ah Q saw him, he turned and followed him as fast as he could. When that man turned, Ah Q turned too, and when after turning a corner that man stopped, Ah Q stopped too. He saw there was nothing behind, and that the man was Little D.

"What is the matter?" asked Ah Q resentfully.

"Chao . . . the Chao family have been robbed," panted Little D.

Ah Q's heart went pit-a-pat. After telling him this Little D left. Ah Q ran on and then stopped three or four times. However since he had once been in the business himself, he felt exceptionally courageous, and so emerging from the street corner he listened carefully, and thought he could hear some shouting; he also looked carefully and thought he could see a lot of men in white helmets and white armour, carrying off cases, carrying off furniture, even carrying off the Ningpo bed of the successful county candidate's wife; however, he could not see them very clearly. He wanted to go nearer, but his feet were rooted to the ground.

There was no moon that night, and Weichuang was very still in the pitch darkness, as quiet as in the peaceful days of the ancient Emperor Fu Hsi. Ah Q stood there until he lost interest, yet everything still seemed the same as before; in the distance were people moving to and fro, carrying things, carrying off cases, carrying off furniture, carrying off the Ningpo bed of the successful county candidate's wife . . . carrying until he himself could hardly believe his own eyes. But he decided not to go nearer, and went back to the temple.

It was even darker in the Tutelary God's Temple. When he had closed the big gate he groped his way into his room, and only after he had lain down for some time did he feel calm enough to begin to think how this affected him. The men in white helmets and white armour had evidently arrived, but they had not come to call him; they had moved out a lot of things, but there was no share for him — this was all the fault of the Imitation Foreign Devil, who had barred him from the rebellion. Otherwise how could he have failed to have a share this time?

The more Ah Q thought of it the angrier he felt, until he was

in a towering temper and nodding his head maliciously, exclaimed, "So no rebellion for me, only for you, eh? You son of a bitch Imitation Foreign Devil, — all right, be a rebel! The penalty for revolting is decapitation. I shall have to turn informer, to see you carried into town to have your head cut off — you and all your family. . . . Kill, kill!"

Chapter IX

The Grand Finale

After the Chao family was robbed most of the people in Weichuang felt pleased yet fearful, and Ah Q was no exception. But four days later Ah Q was suddenly dragged into town in the middle of the night. It happened to be a dark night when a squad of soldiers, a squad of militia, a squad of police and five secret service men made their way quietly to Weichuang, and under cover of darkness surrounded the Tutelary God's Temple, posting a machine gun opposite the entrance, but still Ah Q did not rush out. For a long time nothing stirred in the temple. The captain grew impatient and offered a reward of twenty dollars. Only then did two of the militiamen dare take the risk, jump over the wall and enter. Then with cooperation from within, the others rushed in and dragged Ah Q out. But not until he had been carried out of the temple to somewhere near the machine gun, did he begin to sober up.

It was already midday when they reached the town, and Ah Q found himself carried to a dilapidated yamen where, after taking five or six turnings, he was pushed into a small room. No sooner had he stumbled inside than the door made of wooden bars forming a grating closed upon his heels. The rest of the room consisted of three blank walls, and when he looked round carefully, he saw two other men in a corner of the room.

Although Ah Q was feeling rather bewildered, he was by no means too depressed, because his bedroom in the Tutelary God's Temple was in no way superior to this room. The two other men also seemed to be villagers. They gradually fell into conversation

with him, and one of them told him that the Successful Provincial Candidate wanted to dun him for the rent owed by his grandfather; the other did not know why he was there. When they questioned Ah Q, he answered quite frankly, "Because I wanted to revolt."

That afternoon he was dragged out through the barred door again and taken to a big hall, at the far end of which was sitting an old man with his head shaved clean. Ah Q wondered whether this were a monk, but when he saw soldiers standing beneath and a dozen men in long coats on both sides, some with their heads clean-shaved like this old man and some with a foot or so of hair hanging over their shoulders like the Imitation Foreign Devil, but all glaring at him furiously from grim faces, then he knew this man must be someone important. At once the joints of his knees relaxed of their own accord, and he knelt down.

"Stand up to speak! Don't kneel!" shouted all the men in the long coats.

Although Ah Q appeared to understand, he felt incapable of standing up; his body had involuntarily dropped to a squatting position, and improving on it, he finally knelt down.

"Slave! . . ." exclaimed the long coated men again contemptuously, however they did not insist on his getting up.

"Tell the truth and you will get off lighter," said the old man with the shaved head, in a low but clear voice, fixing his eyes on Ah Q. "I know everything already. When you have confessed, I will let you go."

"Confess!" repeated the long coated men loudly.

"The fact is I wanted . . . to come . . ." muttered Ah Q disjointedly, after a moment's confused thinking.

"In that case, why didn't you come?" asked the old man gently.

"The Imitation Foreign Devil wouldn't let me!"

"Nonsense! It is too late to talk now. Where are your accomplices?"

"What? . . ."

"The people who robbed the Chao family that night."

"They didn't come to call me. They moved the things away themselves." The mention of this made Ah Q indignant.

"Where did they go? When you have told me I will let you go," said the old man even more gently.

"I don't know, . . . they didn't come to call me. . . ."

Then at a sign from the old man Ah Q was dragged again through the barred door. The next time that he was dragged out again was the following morning.

Everything was unchanged in the big hall. The old man with the clean-shaved head was still sitting there, and Ah Q knelt down again as before.

"Have you anything else to say?" asked the old man gently.

Ah Q thought, and decided there was nothing to say, so he answered, "Nothing."

Then a man in a long coat brought a sheet of paper and held a brush in front of Ah Q, which he wanted to thrust into his hand. Ah Q was now nearly frightened out of his wits, because this was the first time in his life that his hand had ever come into contact with a writing brush. He was just wondering how to hold it when the man pointed out a place on the paper, and told him to sign his name.

"I — I — can't write," said Ah Q, nervous and shamefaced, holding the brush.

"In that case, to make it easy for you, draw a circle!"

Ah Q tried to draw a circle, but the hand with which he grasped the brush trembled, so the man spread the paper on the ground for him. Ah Q bent down and as painstakingly as if his life depended on it, drew a circle. He was afraid people would laugh at him and determined to make the circle round; however, not only was that wretched brush very heavy, but it would not do his bidding, wobbling instead from side to side; and just as the line was about to close it swerved out again, making a shape like a melon seed.

While Ah Q was ashamed because he had not been able to draw a round circle, that man had already taken back the paper and brush without any comment; and then a number of people dragged him back for the third time through the barred door.

The third time that he entered that barred door, he did not feel particularly irritated. He supposed that in this world it was the fate of everybody at some time to be dragged in and out of prison, and to have to draw circles on paper; it was only because his circle had not been round that he felt there was a blot on his escutcheon. However, presently he regained composure, thinking to himself, "Only idiots can make perfect circles." And with this thought he fell asleep.

That night, however, the Successful Provincial Candidate was unable to go to sleep, because he had quarrelled with the captain. The Successful Provincial Candidate had insisted that the most important thing was to recover the stolen goods, while the captain said the most important thing was to make a public example. Recently the captain had come to treat the Successful Provincial Candidate quite disdainfully, so, banging his fist on the table, he said, "'Punish one to awe one hundred!' See now, I have been a member of the revolutionary party for less than twenty days, but there have been a dozen cases of robbery, none of them solved yet; and think how badly that reflects on me. And now that one case has been solved, you come to argue like a pedant. It won't do! This is my affair."

The Successful Provincial Candidate had been very upset, but had still persisted, saying that if the stolen goods were not recovered, he would resign immediately from his post as assistant civil administrator. "As you please!" said the captain.

In consequence the Successful Provincial Candidate did not sleep that night, but happily he did not hand in his resignation after all the next day.

The third time that Ah Q was dragged out from the barred door, was the morning following the night on which the Successful Provincial Candidate had been unable to sleep. When he reached the big hall, the old man with the clean-shaved head was still sitting there as usual, and Ah Q also knelt down as usual.

Very gently the old man questioned him: "Have you anything more to say?"

Ah Q thought, and decided there was nothing to say, so he answered, "Nothing."

A number of men in long coats and short jackets put on him a white vest of foreign cloth, with some black characters on it. Ah Q felt considerably disconcerted, because this was very like mourning dress, and to wear mourning was unlucky. At the same time his hands were bound behind his back, and he was dragged out of the yamen.

Ah Q was lifted onto an uncovered cart, and several men in short jackets sat down with him. The cart started off at once; in front were a number of soldiers and militiamen shouldering foreign rifles, and on both sides were crowds of gaping spectators, while what was behind Ah Q could not see. But suddenly it occurred to

him — "Am I not going to have my head cut off?" He was struck with alarm and everything turned dark before his eyes, while there was a humming in his ears as if he had fainted. But he did not really faint. Although he felt frightened some of the time, at other times he was quite calm; it seemed to him that in this world probably it was the fate of everybody at some time to have their heads cut off.

He still recognised the road and felt rather surprised: why were they not going to the execution ground? He did not know that he was being paraded round the streets in order to make a public example. But if he had known, it would have been the same; he would only have thought that in this world probably it was the fate of everybody at some time to be made a public example.

Then he realised that they were making a detour to the execution ground, so he must be going to have his head cut off. He looked round him regretfully at the people swarming after him like ants, and unexpectedly in the crowd of people by the road he caught sight of Amah Wu. So that was why he had not seen her for so long: she had been working in town.

Ah Q suddenly became ashamed of his lack of spirit, because he had not sung any lines from an opera. His thoughts revolved like a whirlwind: *The Young Widow at her Husband's Grave* was not heroic enough. The words of "I regret to have killed" in *The Battle of Dragon and Tiger* were too poor. *I thrash you with a Steel Mace* was still the best. But when he wanted to raise his hands, he remembered that they were bound together; so he did not sing *I thrash you* either.

"After twenty years I shall be another . . . " Ah Q, in his agitation, said this half sentence of a saying which came to him naturally though he neither learned nor spoke it before.

"Good! ! !" roared the crowd of people, like the growl of a wolf.

The cart moved steadily forward. During the shouting Ah Q's eyes turned in search of Amah Wu, but she did not seem to have seen him, simply looking raptly at the foreign rifles carried by the soldiers.

So Ah Q took another look at the shouting people.

At that instant his thoughts revolved again like a whirlwind. Four years before, at the foot of the mountain, he had met a hungry wolf which had followed him at a set distance, wanting to

eat him. He had nearly died of fright, but luckily he happened to have a wood chopper in his hand, which gave him the courage to get back to Weichuang. But he had never forgotten that wolf's eyes, fierce yet cowardly, glimmering like two will-o'-the-wisps, as if piercing into his skin from a distance. But now he saw eyes more terrible even than he had ever seen before: dull yet penetrating eyes that seemed to have devoured his words, but to be still eager to devour something beyond his flesh and blood. And these eyes kept following him at a set distance.

These eyes seemed to have joined in one, already biting into his soul.

"Help, help!"

But Ah Q never uttered these words. Already all had turned black before his eyes, there was a buzzing in his ears, and he felt as if his whole body were scattering like so much light dust.

As for the after-effects of the robbery, the most affected was the Successful Provincial Candidate, because the stolen goods were never recovered. All his family lamented bitterly. Next came the Chao household; for when the successful county candidate went into town to report the robbery, not only did he have his pigtail cut off by bad revolutionaries, but he had to pay a reward of twenty dollars into the bargain; so all the Chao family too lamented bitterly. From that day forward they all gradually developed the typical air of the survivors of a fallen dynasty.

As for any discussion of the event, no question was raised in Weichuang, for naturally everyone said Ah Q must be a bad man, and the proof that he was bad was that he had been shot; for if he had not been bad, how could he have been shot? But the opinion in town was unfavourable; most people were dissatisfied, thinking a shooting was not such a fine spectacle as a decapitation; and what a ridiculous culprit that he had been too, to have passed through so many streets without singing a single line from an opera. They had followed him for nothing.

December, 1921.

COAL

by Li Na

Tien-wen was a well-known petty thief in Harbin, on whom several stays in jail made no impression.

"The jail is my home," he boasted. "I miss it when I'm away."

In January of this year, he was arrested again, and sentenced to six months to be served in the coal mines. He lived in the barracks with the regular miners, and spent the first two weeks snoring on the *kang*, pretending he was sick. One day his bones ached . . . the next day his muscle hurt . . . he couldn't eat. . . . But when the men left to go to work, he prepared food for himself.

One day, Comrade Chen, the union leader, surprised him cooking, before he had a chance to hop back onto the *kang*.

"I'm feeling much better, Mr. Chen," he said, trying to appear casual. "I can start work in a day or so."

"You'd better work or you won't have anything to eat."

"Just tell me what you want me to do. Even if you don't give me food I can still manage."

"What kind of work do you want to do?"

"Let me watch the water pump," replied Tien-wen without an instant's hesitation.

"That's work for women and old men!" laughed the union leader. "You're young and strong — pick something else."

"You pick it. Anything that's light will do."

"Suppose you push a coal cart, since you can't do heavy work. There are three to a cart and you'll have two men to help you. Work is good for a young fellow — much better than the shady way you used to live." Chen handed him one hundred dollars. "Get yourself a haircut and take a bath."

He explained to Tien-wen that old and new workers were treated alike. Everyone who worked was paid. Tien-wen "uh-huh"ed agreeably, but he thought to himself — What do I want this trifle for? In Harbin I can make hundreds of thousands in a single piece of "business". Why work so hard for pennies!

Early the next morning, he reported to the union office. "I'm ready to start, Mr. Chen," he said. "Let me have a piece of rope for a belt. I have to dress right for the job!"

The union leader looked him over with approval. "Your hair is cut and you look clean and neat," he said and gave him a piece of rope. "What else do you want?"

"Not a thing." Tien-wen tucked the front part of his long padded gown under the rope at his waist, struck a heroic pose and strode out the door with the exaggerated gestures of an opera character.

After he registered in the transport section, he was assigned to a coal cart with two experienced workmen. He went through the motions of pushing but didn't exert any strength, and the cart didn't budge.

"Put a little push behind it," said one of the workmen.

"What do you think I'm doing?" he retorted, but the cart still didn't move.

The minute the workmen relaxed, he took his hands off the cart. "You fellows are supposed to help us newcomers. If you don't push, there's nothing I can do about it!"

Other carts began to line up behind theirs. At the far end of the tracks, the coal dumpers waited impatiently for the arrival of the coal cart and shouted for them to hurry up.

"Come on everyone, give us a hand," cried Tien-wen, standing to one side. "Help us push this cart!"

Naturally, a number of workmen came running up and put their weight behind the heavy vehicle. Tien-wen squatted beside the tracks and took a wheat cake out of his pocket. "Careful there!" he said, between mouthfuls. "That's no toy! Watch that it doesn't run over your foot!"

The chief of the transport section got tired of Tien-wen constantly delaying the work, and told him to leave. Delighted, he went back to the dormitory and took a nap, then called on the union leader.

HSIAO CHUAN-CHIU: Workman Guarding His Factory against Destruction by Reactionaries on the Eve of Liberation

"They let me do all the pushing," he complained. "How could I move the cart myself? I would have criticized them, but I was afraid they'd swear at me."

"Don't lie to me," said the union leader. "I know that you've been soldiering on the job. Tomorrow I'm sending you to the storeroom to sew gunny sacks, and I want you to do your work properly."

The next day Comrade Chen personally escorted him to the storeroom, and was pleased to discover that his charge proved to be very skilful, and could sew a whole sack in the time that others made only twenty stitches. He left, urging him to keep up the good work.

As soon as the door closed behind Comrade Chen, Tien-wen put down his needle and surveyed the three who were working with him. "Are you women?" he demanded. "What are you doing women's work for?"

The others paid no attention to him.

"Do you want to hear the news from Harbin?" he asked.

"Hurry up with your sewing," they replied. "It's almost noon."

"We should only do as much work as they pay us for," he said in all seriousness. "The miners earn a couple of thousands a day digging coal. We get less than a thousand for a day's work. We're crazy if we sweat too much over this!"

He stuck his head in front of the sack stitchers. "Would you like to hear some songs from *The Boast of the Servant Girl?* I'll sing a few for you."

Clearing his throat, he burst forth into — *"The maid was dusting in the best room in the house . . ."* and in spite of themselves, his audience slowed their work to listen to him.

"You can't just listen and not give any money," he protested. "No, that won't do. You'll have to pay something. Suppose you give me one of every three sacks you stitch, and I'll sing for you every day!"

When the foreman came in, he pretended to be busy, but the minute he left, Tien-wen again turned the storeroom into a theatre.

At the end of the day, as he was leaving, he noticed some whisk brooms stacked in a corner, and stuffed one in his sleeve. From the storeroom, he went to the cooperative store, where his nose was tantalized by the fragrant odor of the stewed pork on the counters. Trying hard to look like a customer, he stole a large piece, including the cloth with which it was covered.

He returned to the barracks and invited the miners to join him in a meat dinner.

"How much was it a *catty?*" asked one of them.

"I bought this by the piece," he replied nonchalantly.

One of the workmen, named Yang, had a very loud, booming voice, and was known by the nickname of "Cannon". He noticed the new whisk broom on the *kang*. Only our storeroom has those things, he thought to himself. "Whose whisk broom is that?" he asked.

"Mine," said Tien-wen.

"Where did you get it?"

"I picked it up on the road," said Tien-wen casually.

"That came from the storeroom," another workman said flatly.

"Did any of you see me take it?" demanded Tien-wen angrily. "Don't try to dirty my name! What's wrong with finding something on the road?"

The miners surrounded him and yelled at him from all sides.

"You took something that doesn't belong to you and you still won't admit you're wrong? . . . I bet that pork is stolen too! . . . You're spoiling our reputation!"

"How much does reputation cost a catty?" sneered Tien-wen.

"Let's hold a hearing!" shouted a miner.

"Hearing? As long as you don't hit me, that'll be fine!" scoffed Tien-wen.

The men were red in the face with anger. "Come on! We'll take him to the union!" they roared.

Tien-wen jerked his padded-gown straight. "If we're going to the union, let's go!" he said with bravado, then, seeing that they were bringing along the meat and the whisk broom, added, half in jest, "You fellows are always talking about not picking on people. If you don't call this picking on me, what do you call it?"

When they reached the union office, the men put the stolen goods on the table in front of the union leader. "Comrade Chen, take a look at this!" they said, and told him what they had discovered.

"Tien-wen," said Chen sternly, "you're behaving disgracefully. You've broken our regulations several times. The next time you steal anything, I'm going to send you to the guard house!"

Tien-wen looked at the furious men around him, and was afraid that the union leader would make good his threat. I'd better go easy for a while, he thought.

"I've been wrong," he said humbly. "I swear to you — if I ever do anything like this again may I be struck by five thunderbolts!"

Somewhat appeased, the miners began drifting out. The union leader took Tien-wen by the arm. "Sit down for a while," he said in a friendly tone. "We two should have a little talk."

He gave Tien-wen a cigarette and during the course of their casual conversatioin, gradually drew from him the story of his life.

Tien-wen was born on a farm of poor parents and married early. After his parents died, he and his wife moved in with his uncle. He served in the army for a few years and, when he was discharged, went to Harbin to try to start a business. But the Northeastern Provinces were under Japanese occupation, he had no influential relatives, and he couldn't make a go of things. He became acquainted with some petty thieves in the hotel in which he was living, and they taught him the trade. After his first few successes, he found he liked his easy way of earning money. He took to gambling, smoking opium, became a morphine addict, spent a great deal of his time in brothels — he tried everything. His wife was thrown out by his uncle, who felt disgraced by his goings-on. She went to Harbin and moved in with Tien-wen. He would leave her four or five days at a time. When she asked him where he had been, he would change the subject.

"But there's no wall that doesn't have a crack in it — the truth will out," Tien-wen said to the union leader. "In the end, my wife found out what I was doing, and she cried and said she was going to kill herself. 'I can't help myself,' I told her, but I promised her I'd try to find other work. But, Mr. Chen, except when my pockets are full of money . . . . "

"Who's taking care of your wife now?" asked the union leader.

"I don't know. Maybe she's been thrown out of the hotel. The kind of man I am, I can't take care of anybody."

"Do you still love your wife?"

Tien-wen's eyes flashed, then he hung his head. "My wife is a good woman, Mr. Chen," he said. "I can't face her. . . . "

"You should be more considerate of her. If you'll work hard, we can send for her."

"My name smells from here to high heaven. I'll never be able to lift my head again," said Tien-wen dejectedly. "From the time a man is born, every day he lives brings him one day nearer to death. Each day is the same, whether I spend it happily, or in jail, or at hard work. . . . "

"You're all wrong," interrupted Chen. "In the old days, you stole because you couldn't make a living, but now we have a new society and everybody can work. You're under thirty and you have a long future ahead of you. Even an old gaffer like me, with one foot in the grave — the more I work, the better I feel. If you do your work well, you'll be given credit for it like the other miners, and besides, your sentence will be reduced."

Tien-wen nodded, but in his heart he thought — that's right, if I kill myself with work!

"I'm going to send you to work in the pits. The jobs pay very well — seventy to eighty thousand a month. You'll have plenty of money."

After Tien-wen returned to his quarters, Comrade Chen sent a telegram to the hotel where Tien-wen said his wife had been living, inviting her to move to the mining village.

Meanwhile, Tien-wen's mind was filled with nothing but ideas of escape. But to run away he needed traveling expenses. For a long time he had had his eye on the bag of the worker who slept next to him. The man was quiet, a non-drinker, and rather effeminate in manner. For that reason the others had been calling him "Big Sister" for so long that they had forgotten his real name.

Big Sister was a hard worker, and every month earned nearly $90,000 in the pits. His weakness was clothes, and he spent most of his money on them. He had a pair of good brown leather shoes and a fine suit of clothes lined with red satin. Because the weather was cold, he kept them in his bag, but he was constantly taking them out to look at them, and Tien-wen had spotted them from the start.

Tien-wen wanted to steal the clothes. At first he was afraid of being caught, but before long he determined to take the chance. If they catch me, the clothes remain his. If I get away, the clothes are mine, he rationalised. Whoever dresses warmly is comfortable — whoever eats well is full. . . . The Communists are a joke. They're always preaching democracy. They just talk but they don't do me any good. What's the use of that?

That day, he went down into the mine with the pit foreman. As they descended the sloping ramp to the lower levels, Tien-wen nearly slipped on the slimy surface of water and coal dust. His safety lamp cast a feeble beam that only illuminated a few feet in front of him, and he narrowly missed banging his head against the low hanging rafters several times.

This is the road to Hell! he swore to himself. What son of a bitch ever invented a coal mine!

The pit foreman strode on as surely as if he were taking a stroll in the bright sunlight, occasionally pointing out dangerous spots. At last, they reached their destination, and the foreman told him to sit down and rest a few minutes. He was assigned to the section of Cannon Yang and Big Sister.

"Cannon Yang is the section chief," said the foreman. "If there's anything you don't understand, ask him."

This is tough luck — working together with him, thought Tien-wen, but never mind. Anyhow, I won't be here long.

He looked at the meticulous Big Sister, whose face was black with coal dust, but who still flashed his gleaming white teeth in a smile of friendly greeting. What're you goddam happy about? thought Tien-wen. Take a peek in the mirror and you'll see you don't need any make-up to look like a devil! And that Cannon Yang — he still can sing down here! . . .

Big Sister stared at him sitting on his pick-ax. "Seen enough?" he asked. "Looking won't bring any coal out!"

"Come on over here," said Cannon Yang. "I'll show you how to dig." He took Tien-wen's hands together with the pick-ax and swung with him a few times. "That's the way it's done. It's easy. Let me show you." He whirled the pick-ax into a vein of coal. "Don't twist it from the wrists like a sword juggler, but put the force of your arms and shoulders behind it."

Tien-wen picked up his ax and heaved mightily. His mother's — ! This isn't coal, it's iron! "The stuff won't come out!" he muttered.

"Maybe you can dig this junk — I can't," he said to Cannon Yang. "Come on — Let's wrestle instead!"

"You can start digging in a few days," said Cannon Yang. "For the present, do some shoveling."

"I never did this kind of work since the time I came out of my mother's belly," grumbled Tien-wen. "Of all the seventy-two trades in the world, which one is this?"

He clambered on to the ledge where the others were digging, dragging his shovel as if it weighed a thousand catties. He shoved it with such force into the pile of coal that the shovel and coal together went crashing down to the floor below.

"I dropped my shovel!"

"Are you trying to mess up on purpose?" asked Big Sister accusingly.

"My hand slipped and it felt down."

"Stop gabbing," said Big Sister impatiently. "Go pick it up."

This was just what Tien-wen was waiting for. Leaping to the floor, he deliberately struck his head against the jagged wall. "Aiya!" he howled. "I've split my skull!" and clutched his head with both hands.

Cannon Yang saw that he was bleeding. "Go up to the infirmary and have them take care of it," he said.

Tien-wen was delighted that his plan had worked so successfully. The same day, he and Big Sister's bag both disappeared.

Two days later, Tien-wen's wife arrived at the coal mine town. Comrade Chen was very upset and asked her to move into a small room next to the barracks, in the same building. He told her not to worry, and promised that she would be escorted back to Harbin if her husband didn't show up in a few days.

That same night, as she tossed sleeplessly on her bed, she heard the sound of angry voices in the next room. She could clearly distinguish the union leader saying, "I told you you couldn't get away. The poor people love their mountains and streams, and here they love their mine. Children stand as sentries all over the place — where can you run to? Now do you believe me?"

"Why did you try to run away?" demanded another voice. "What's wrong with teaching you a trade and asking you to study? Has anybody here mistreated you?"

"Speak up," cried several men. "Why don't you say something?"

"I made this little mistake . . ." said a very familiar voice. The child began to cry and drowned out the rest of the sentence. Carrying the baby in her arms, the woman walked into the next room.

There was her husband, Tien-wen. At the sight of him, tears welled to her eyes.

"Who told you to come here?" cried Tien-wen starting with surprise.

"Didn't you send me a telegram?"

"I never sent you any telegram!"

"The government is so good to you," said the woman, wiping her eyes. "They urge you to reform and give you money besides . . . they even send for your family! What are you running away for? Haven't I been through enough these past few years? I was thrown out of our house . . . all the neighbours

laughed at me. . . . If it weren't for our baby, I'd have killed myself long ago!"

She sobbed bitterly, but finally brought herself under control.

"After you left, I watched for you day and night," she continued. "We had nothing to eat. The only thing I could think of was to go back to your uncle and beg for his help. He wouldn't even let me in. It was night-time and snowing, and I was carrying the child. I didn't know where to go. . . . I had no money for an inn. . . . At last we got back to the hotel in Harbin. I just waited and waited . . . don't ask me how we lived. . . . Then your telegram came. I was so happy. . . . I thought, now we have hope, and rushed here to you. . . ."

She broke down again and couldn't continue. The baby also began to cry. As the men looked at the stricken Tien-wen and his heart-broken wife, several of them blew their noses violently.

"Who knew that you were going to run away?" said the woman miserably, half to herself. "These people are so good to you; I knew it as soon as I came here. What kind of herat do you have? Do you want me and the baby to starve to death? Do we mean anything to you at all?"

"Don't say any more," begged Tien-wen.

"Get some rest and don't worry," comforted several of the men. "You can talk it over with him later."

Big Sister had been intending to get up and demand the return of his clothes, but in the midst of this tragic scene, he didn't have the heart to speak. Forget it, he said to himself. I'm a bachelor and can always get along. His wife has just come — I'll consider the clothes a house-warming gift.

The next day, Tien-wen sought the union leader. "My wife refuses to go back. She wants to live here," he said shame-facedly. "Mr. Chen, what shall I do about food and rooms? . . ."

"Don't worry about a place to live," said Chen. "We've already arranged that for you. It's that red brick house. I'll advance you some money to buy food. Cooking utensils will be sent over soon. The stove is all fixed."

"Thank you," beamed Tien-wen.

"Now that your family has come, you should work in the pits where you can earn more money," said the union leader. "If you work twenty-eight shifts a month, you'll receive a small merit and have your sentence reduced one month. If your production exceeds

its quota by thirty per cent, you'll be given a large merit and your sentence will be reduced by three months."

Tien-wen hung his head in embarrassment.

After he left, the union leader called Cannon Yang for a private talk. "I want you to work together with Tien-wen," he said. "I'll give you a small merit if you can reform him."

"I'd be willing to share a month's wage with him if that would cure him," replied Cannon Yang.

The next day, Yang took Tien-wen with him to work in the mine. He gave him various odd jobs to do, and said nothing when he saw him loafing at his work. After working hours, he made a point of chatting with Tien-wen.

Three days later, the blackboard "newspaper" had an item praising Tien-wen. This was part of the policy to encourage new workers. He couldn't help feeling rather proud.

"What did you do before you came here?" he asked Cannon Yang curiously during the afternoon rest period.

"I was just like you — I used to be a loafer. Now I'm putting everything into production. Idlers aren't allowed in a people's democracy. There's no future for that kind of person any more."

"This work is too hard. It doesn't suit me."

"You'll get used to it after a couple of days. Once you make up your mind to do it, you won't even know when you're tired. . . . You still seem to be confused. Didn't the new workers from Harbin say idlers couldn't live there? What's the use of trying to get away? We'll work and dig coal and earn some merits. Then maybe they'll let you join the union."

I suppose he's right, thought Tien-wen. Stealing is out, and anyhow my wife is here. I'll work, earn a few merits, have my sentence reduced. We can go back and set up a small stand and do some business. It'll be better than digging this damn coal.

"Show me how to dig," he said to Yang.

This time he listened to instructions, and managed to dig out a little coal. His muscles ached and he raised blisters on his hands, but he kept working tenaciously.

By the end of the month, he hadn't missed a day's work and won a small merit. On pay day, Cannon Yang placed a roll of bills in his hand.

"We two earned $100,000 this month," said Yang. "Half belongs to you. Take it."

The money was in crisp red $500 notes, and though there really wasn't very much, Tien-wen was more impressed with the few dollars he had earned by the sweat of his brow than with any pile of banknotes he had stolen in the past.

"Yang, old man," he said generously, "let's buy some meat and go back to my place and make dumplings."

They crossed the main street and entered the cooperative store. There was a large crowd at the meat counter. Tien-wen, as he pushed his way forward, for the first time didn't feel half a head shorter than his fellow-men. And when he shouted his order to the clerk, he was surprised to hear how clear and firm his voice had become.

On the way home with the meat and a bottle of wine, other workers he met greeted him cheerfully and friendlily. Not one asked with suspicion where he got the things. It was the best day of his life!

In April, in preparation for the celebration of the coming Labour Day, a competition was arranged — pit against pit, section against section. Cannon Yang's section, containing Tien-wen, Big Sister, and two others, was matched against Section Four.

The crunch of the pick axes, the boom of the explosives, and the grinding of the wheels of the coal carts drowned out the voices of the men. Everyone worked rapidly in the light of their flickering lamps.

Cannon Yang was an old hand, and coal seem to rain down from his pick ax. The section was so fast that coal accumulated more rapidly than the coal carts could wheel it away. The cavern rang with their calls for "Cart!". Tien-wen swung his pick like a man possessed. Digging and blasting, his section soon surpassed its friendly rival.

As Tien-wen helped Big Sister shovel coal into the carts, he said joyfully, for at least the tenth time, "We eat coal and we wear coal; every family can have it. Everyone must have coal — it's really precious stuff!"

When the statistics were compiled at the end of the month, it was recorded that Cannon Yang's section had over-fulfilled its quota by 50%, and each member received a large merit.

On May 1, early in the morning of the Labour Day holiday, Tien-wen sought the union leader. "Mr. Chen, I'd like to invite you to my house."

The union leader looked at his beaming countenance. "All right," he consented. "I'll come soon."

About an hour later, when Chen arrived, he found Tien-wen pulling his baby around the yard in a hand-made cart. Tien-wen welcomed him enthusiastically and led him into the house.

The interior was neat and clean. There was a new reed mat on the *kang*, on which rested a small home-made table, bearing candy, cigarettes and tea cups. Tien-wen and his wife begged Chen to be seated.

"This is your lucky day," laughed Chen. "I should be inviting you out to celebrate instead of you inviting me here."

"You've been like a father to me," said Tien-wen warmly. "My wife is always talking about you."

"I don't deserve any credit," said Chen. "It belongs to the Communist Party. You know the old saying that if you plant more opium, more people will smoke opium; if you plant more kaoliang, more people will eat kaoliang. . . . Well, the Communists urge everyone to be good, and the result is more people *are* good!"

"We'll never forget what the Communist Party has done for us," said the wife. "It has turned scrap iron into steel."

"Your term is up here," Chen said. "Do you want to go back to the city?"

"No," said Tien-wen, smiling at his wife. "We've decided that's the last thing we want to do! I have a little vegetable garden and a few pigs, which takes care of most of our food problems. My wife earns some extra money by sewing and mending. We have a fine life here."

Yet in spite of his cheerful words, Tien-wen obviously had something troubling him. He poured some tea for the union leader, and said to his wife, "Why don't you take the baby out for a while? I want to talk to Mr. Chen alone."

"What kind of secrets have you two got?" laughed his wife, but she nevertheless complied.

After she left, the room became very silent. Tien-wen seemed to be struggling in his mind with a difficult problem. Finally he took a small package from an inner pocket and handed it to the union leader. Chen looked at him, puzzled.

"I'll tell you the truth," said Tien-wen. "I had this $10,000 a long time. I was planning to use it to take my wife and run away. Now I wouldn't go if you forced me. The money has been a burden to me. I wish you'd return it for me. . . ."

"Whose money is it?" asked Chen, somewhat embarrassed.

"I pawned Big Sister's clothes after I stole them. He paid this much to get them back from the pawn shop. You knew I stole the clothes but you didn't expose me. I'm very grateful. My wife is a decent woman, and she wouldn't have been able to stay on here and face people if you had said anything then." He clasped his hands over his knee and continued. "I work in the same section with Big Sister and I feel rotten every time I see him. Please, give it back to him so I can lift my head again."

"So far as we're concerned, the past is dead," the union leader comforted him.

Just then, Tien-wen's wife, Big Sister, and Cannon Yang entered. "We've come to take you to the meeting," said the men. "You're going to get a commendation!"

On their way to the meeting hall, Tien-wen whispered to Comrade Chen.

"Now that I'm going to work here as a regular miner, if you want to make my happiness complete, I hope you'll approve my application to join the union!"

Marriage

by MA FENG

Tien Chun-sheng, Branch Secretary of the Ching Shui Village Youth League, woke up four times during the night in his impatience to go to the district for his marriage certificate. He was up before dawn, and, as soon as he had finished his meal and changed into a white cotton jacket, set off as fast as his legs would carry him. The sun was just peering over the hills as he left the village.

Tien Chun-sheng's sweetheart, Yang Hsiao-ching, daughter of Labour Hero Yang Wan-yu of Liu Lin Village, was three years younger than Chun-sheng — that is exactly twenty this year. Liu Lin village was over three miles from Ching Shui Village, and Chun-sheng and Hsiao-ching had met for the first time in spring the previous year when all the villages in the district held a drama contest; they fell in love at first sight, started exchanging letters, and very soon reached an understanding.

The parents in both families were delighted by the development. By a strange coincidence Chun-sheng's father and old Yang Wan-yu knew each other too. Seven or eight years before, both having failed to pay rent, they had been arrested by their respective landlords and sent to the dark cell in the gaol, where they spent over a fortnight together. Little had they dreamt they would become releated by marriage in the new society, and both urged the young people to hasten the joyful day. But although this happy occasion had been talked of for at least a year, it was postponed again and again.

First they had agreed to get married after the summer harvest the previous year. Chun-sheng's whole family had set to work to prepare for the wedding: repairing the house, making bedding, etc. All the finishing touches had been put and the day fixed, when suddenly a letter came from Hsiao-ching saying the marriage must be postponed. Chun-sheng hurried straight over to Liu Lin Village to find Hsiao-ching and ask her the reason. "A Mother and Child Sanitation Training Class has recently been started in the County City," she told him. "Both the village and district authorities have agreed to my going. What do you think?"

Instead of trying to prevent her, Chun-sheng said with a smile: "You'll be learning a skill with which you can serve the people. I mustn't stand in your way; I approve!"

So the wedding was deferred, and the old couple's hopes came to nothing. By the time Hsiao-ching had completed her course and came back, it was winter. Once again the old couple urged their son to seize time by the forelock and get married. Chun-sheng went to consult Hsiao-ching. But the latter said: "What an impatient man! I'm only just back from studying, and the mother and child sanitation work isn't really under way yet. If we are so set on our own affairs it will give people a very bad impression. I'd like to wait till after the lunar New Year. . . ."

Without waiting for her to finish speaking Chun-sheng said with a smile: "I'm too self-centred; I agree with you."

As soon as the lunar New Year was over, preparations for the spring ploughing started. This year there was a great production drive, and the chief task of the Youth League was to lead young people to increase production. Chun-sheng was concurrently Branch Secretary of the Youth League and leader of their mutual-aid team, and had therefore to spur everybody on to choose seeds, buy up-to-date agricultural implements, sink wells and plant trees. He was up to his ears in work, busy from morning to night, so that he had no time even to think of marriage. Only his mother remarked from time to time: "How much longer will you delay! Gracious heavens!" Now the spring ploughing was over, and there was still a month and twenty days to go before harvesting the wheat, so the old couple had started pressing their son again. The previous afternoon Chun-sheng had made a trip to Liu Lin Village and had a long talk with Hsiao-ching. At first she said: "Why

not wait another month or so, until the wheat is harvested? I hate to be in such a hurry." However she was not proof against Chun-sheng's reiterated persuasion, and finally said, laughing: "What a man! You really are — all right, have it your own way!" And so it was settled. The two of them had agreed to meet today, come wind or rain, in the district government office, and one would not leave the place without seeing the other.

Once out of the village Chun-sheng proceeded along the main road. The road was neatly lined on either side with saplings, which he had led the young people in the village to plant at the Ancestral Memorial Festival. And he thought, "In another ten years these trees will have grown to quite a size. . . ."

Ahead, at a bend in the road, were a dozen or so young willows, one of which was askew as if it had been knocked by a cart, and seemed on the verge of falling. In a few swift strides Chun-sheng had reached it and righted it, pressing the soil firmly round it with his foot. The sight of these young willows warmed the cockles of his heart. He had carried these willow cuttings back himself from Liu Lin Village. That day Hsiao-ching had said to him, laughing: "You must guarantee that they all live!" Chun-sheng had laughed too as he answered: "They're cuttings from the tree in your home, they must be glad to go to live in our village!" At which Hsiao-ching had started chuckling.

Hsiao-ching had an adorable laugh. Her laughter was ringing and clear like a bell. Chun-sheng had never known her to be ill-tempered, she seemed as if she had not a care in the world. She had bright, flashing eyes in a round, rosy face, which reminded Chun-sheng of a car's headlights on a dark night, dispelling gloom and illuminating one's heart.

As he walked Chun-sheng was thinking: "Hsiao-ching is probably on her way to the district government office too now, I shall see her before noon, when we shall both seal that bright red marriage certificate. . . ." Thinking of their future life he could not help smiling secretly. Just then he heard shouts of "Whoa — giddup! — Whoa!" Hastily looking up he saw a big, two-wheeled cart with rubber tyres sunk into the mire. The cart was piled high with goods — a great mound of wooden cases and sacks. The carter was plying his whip and shouting for all

he was worth. Sweat was pouring off the beast, which was panting like a bellows; its hooves had trampled the road into a mire, yet still the cart had not budged an inch. Chun-sheng ran over and lent a hand for some time, but to no purpose. The carter cursed his beast, at the same time slashing at her resentfully with his whip; the mule's front legs buckled and she decided to lie down in the mud. The carter threw his whip to the ground and squatted down angrily by the side of the road. Wiping the mud on his hands Chun-sheng asked: "Where are these goods from?"

"These are comfort bags from the district, to be sent to the station!" The carter wiped his perspiring head with his sleeve and went on desperately: "All the districts are to deliver today, in the afternoon they're to be loaded on the train for Korea; there's still over twenty miles to go! Devil take it!"

When Chun-sheng heard these were the people's presents to comfort the Chinese People's Volunteers, he realised they must not be delayed. His family had given gifts too, and there was a comfort letter there written in his own hand. Hsiao-ching had also given two comfort bags with characters embroidered on them. Chun-sheng went up to the cart again to examine it carefully, and said to the carter:

"There was heavy rain here the day before yesterday. See how your wheels have been bogged down in the mud, and the cart's heavy. In my opinion the only thing is to unload the goods, pull the empty cart out first, and then reload it. Come on, come on, I'll help you!"

The carter looked at Chun-sheng, and said cheerfully:

"Ah, that's an idea! Only it'll take two people a long time; have you nothing important on?"

Chun-sheng thought of his appointment with Hsiao-ching, but he said: "That's all right. It's not early, hurry up and get those ropes untied." He climbed onto the cart to unload, thinking to himself that this cartload of comforts was more important than a marriage certificate; this represented the love of three hundred thousand people, and its loading onto the train must not be delayed.

Two young women came down the road, and Chun-sheng called to them: "Hey! Give us a hand; these are comforts for our

People's Volunteers!" When the two women heard this, knowing that their own gifts were there, they hurried over to help. Later several other passers-by came down the road, all of whom Chun-sheng stopped. They all worked with a will to lift down the things on the cart, and by dint of great effort succeeded in dragging the empty cart out of the mire. Then the whole group helped reload the comforts onto the cart and tied them securely, by which time it was nearly mid-day. The carter breathed a sigh of relief, and said, smiling:

"That's one difficulty passed. If not for all your help sure as fate this important business would have been held up!" Then he turned to ask Chun-sheng: "Which village are you from? I certainly must thank you!"

Mopping his perspiring head Chun-sheng answered: "You'd better make up for lost time; it's getting late!"

Only when Chun-sheng had seen the carter crack his whip and the big cart move northward, did he continue on his way to the district government. He was still five miles from Pai Ho Chen, the seat of the district government, so he strode forward as fast as his legs would carry him, and it seemed to him in his impatience that the sun was moving faster than usual. He thought: "Hsiao-ching must have reached the district government office by now, and she must be tired of waiting for me; maybe she's annoyed with me for being so slow." He longed for wings to fly to Pai Ho Chen as he half walked, half ran forward. The sun seemed a ball of fire, and so did Chun-sheng's heart as he put on a spurt. And Li Min River came into sight ahead. This was a canal newly dug the previous year. The brown dike looked like a low mud wall. Chun-sheng knew that he had put another three miles behind him, and that standing on the bridge he would be able to see Pai Ho Chen, and the thought of Hsiao-ching made him quicken his pace even more. "In less than no time," he thought, "I shall see Hsiao-ching. I shall have that dazzling crimson marriage certificate in my hands."

He climbed up the dike and had just reached the bridge when suddenly a man came running frantically toward him from the other side, with several people chasing after him shouting at the top of their voices: "Stop him! Counter-revolutionary agent! Counter-revolutionary agent!"

Chun-sheng was startled and rushed forward with outspread arms. The other had just reached the further end of the bridge, but now, seeing someone barring his way, he started running south along the dike, with Chun-sheng in hot pursuit behind him. It was mid-day and the peasants had gone home, so the agent gathered confidence and ran for his life. Chun-sheng was straining every nerve to catch up with him, when the agent turned and threw something, shouting as he did so: "Here's a hand grenade!" However Chun-sheng paid no attention, but chased after him without pausing for a moment. Sweat poured into his eyes, making them smart, and as he wiped them with his sleeve he had covered nearly two miles. He had almost overtaken the agent when as ill luck would have it he suddenly slipped, and his left shoe came off. Without stopping to put on his shoe, he scrambled up at once and, with one foot bare, continued his pursuit, calling out: "Stop the counter-revolutionary agent! Stop the counter-revolutionary agent!"

At some distance in the fields were men who had not stopped work. Now carrying their hoes they joined in the chase. In a moment, hearing shouts of "Stop the counter-revolutionary agent!" a shepherd in front, ran over too with a spade. Seeing his luck was out the agent darted sidewise up the river dike, and by the time Chun-sheng followed him up the dike he had already jumped into the canal. The water came up to his waist, and as he forded the stream the agent turned back and said, panting:

"I never harmed you . . . you've no grudge against me. . . . Be a good sort. . . ."

Chun-sheng looked back and saw that the people behind had not yet caught up, while the agent was already in mid-stream. Without the slightest hesitation he leapt straight into the stream, and with a few vigorous movements reached the agent, whereupon the two of them started struggling. The agent bit Chun-sheng's ear, and pressed him under the water. Chun-sheng crying out with pain suddenly swallowed two mouthfuls of water, the stench of which made his nostrils smart and his whole head dizzy. But still he held on to the agent's hand for dear life, and would not let him go. Just then the people behind, including the shepherd, came up. All jumping into the water, they at last caught the agent.

Soaked to the skin, Chun-sheng was helped onto the bank, and sat on the ground gasping for breath. Blood pouring down from

his bitten ear stained his white wedding jacket. His left foot was cut too, and after its soaking in water hurt as if pierced by needles. When the others had tied the agent up securely they asked him how he was. But Chun-sheng shook his head and said: "It's nothing!" Then he asked what village they were from, and how the agent had come to run away. The two men who had started the chase told him that they were from the town Ching Shui and had just finished watering their fields and started home, when they saw this agent cutting the telegraph wires, and immediately ran after him.

They discussed sending the agent straight away to the district government. At that Chun-sheng thought of his own business, and of how Hsiao-ching was still waiting for him in the government office. He stood up abruptly and muttered: "Very well, you tie the rogue up and take him. I've got something important to do!" Having said this he made off, leaving the others bewildered.

On the road he picked up the shoe he had dropped, then hurried straight to Pai Ho Chen. By now his clothes were dry, and his ear had stopped bleeding. He rushed into the district government office, where the first thing he asked was: "Has a girl called Yang Hsiao-ching, from Liu Lin Village, arrived?"

The men in the office said in surprise, "Yang Hsiao-ching? No! How did you get yourself into such a state?"

When Chun-sheng heard the news he was angry, and without another word turned on his heel and left. He had been convinced Hsiao-ching was already there, waiting for him impatiently, but in fact she had not come. Surely there could not have been any change, so that she could not marry him? He had just stepped out of the gate of the office, when Hsiao-ching appeared, perspiring profusely. She said smiling: "You must be tired of waiting! I got up at the peep of dawn, and was on the point of leaving when as luck would have it a woman was taken with labour pains, and I went to deliver the baby. It took a long time, and I was afraid you would be waiting impatiently here so I ran straight off. How did you get your clothes so dirty? Eh? Blood? . . ."

As soon as Chun-sheng heard Hsiao-ching had also been delayed by public business, his anger naturally subsided, and at once he smiled and said: "I've only just come too," then started describing what had happened on the road. The district government office workers came out too, and gathered round to listen with great interest. Just as he was talking, the men arrived with the agent; and as soon as they saw Chun-sheng standing so affectionately beside a girl, they understood why he had hurried off so abruptly. Now Hsiao-ching could no longer hide her love, and stepped forward impulsively to take Chun-sheng's hand. For a long time she could not say a word, but her two big eyes seemed to be saying:

"How I love you!"

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